

## God Loves...

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## God Loves: What Is Love? [1]

*By this we know love, ... love is of God...* (1 John 3:16; 4:7)

Our first ideas and practices of love come from our parents. Some children are never told “I love you” by their parents. Others hear those words accompanied by a warm hug or the coldness of violence and neglect.

Whatever our childhood was like, it was where we first learned about love.

God intended for parents, having learned love from God, to teach their children about God and His love for them and to imitate His love in their home, so that before children could understand the word “love” they would already have seen it in action and practiced it in the ways they were capable. For people who did not learn this love from their family, God preserved a record of the His love in the Bible, where all who seek it can find Him.

God Is. . .

God says “I am...” several things (just, holy, a consuming fire, etc) and among them is “love.” Love is not a learned or developing trait of God. It is a permanent attribute. John says that love is of God (1 Jn. 4:7).

Attitudes, abilities, and attributes can only be known when they are seen in action. How could we know God is powerful, if He never did anything with His power? Likewise, how could we know that God is love, if He never did anything? What do these verses tell us God did which demonstrates love?

1 John 3:16

1 John 4:9

1 John 4:10

Matthew 5:43-48

Love is...

Traditional wedding vows do an adequate job of stating the duties that a man and woman are bound to when promising to love each other. But, I don't think any couple can be more impressed with what they are vowing to do than by vowing to do what 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 says love does. Besides being a fitting list of promises for spouses-to-be, it is a definition of the love that God has shown from eternity. It is a list of what the Christian has committed to do for God and also for His brethren.

How many of the items in 1 Cor. 13 are feelings/emotions? What does this teach us about the most important aspect of the love that is of and from God?

Choose one of the aspects of love from 1 Cor. 13:4-7 and find an example in the Bible where God demonstrated it.

Choose one of these relationships (marriage, man-God, Christian-Christian) and one aspect of love (in 1 Cor. 13) and tell when and why it is hard to act according to love in that aspect.

Why can we not love God and man equally? (Matt. 6:24)

## God Loves The World (Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:19; Rom. 5:8) [2]

Environmentalists, of the tree-hugging sort, are well-known for loving the world by serving the creature rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25). While we are stewards of the earth God gave us dominion over, that is not what God is referring to when He has spoken of His love for the world. While God has said that His physical creation is good, He has a unique love for the part of creation that is very good, made in His image (Gen. 1:27).

### The Eternal Plan of Love Eph. 3:11

What wife is not thrilled and impressed by her husband's love when she learns of all the plans her husband made to arrange an evening together? For mankind, there was an *eternal purpose* accomplished in Christ Jesus. Of course, what Christ accomplished was removing the guilt of sin and restoring man's fellowship with God. This is one of the few things we know about eternity past. In eternity, there was an idea about man and sin, an agreement about how to solve sin and restore fellowship, and an agreement regarding who would participate in various roles. Thus, the love of God for man existed before man existed. In eternity, God so loved the world, that He thought of and planned for us.

What did God do to make mankind aware that this plan existed and that Jesus' life on earth was planned before it happened?

### The Executed Plan of Love Romans 5:8

*When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, . . .* (Gal. 4:4). God's plan was at work all along, in the history of the Jews and Gentiles, but when God sent His Son into the world, the *last days* were beginning (Heb. 1:1). But this plan of love did not just involve Jesus killing time away from His home; it required that Jesus be marred, stricken, smitten, afflicted, wounded, bruised, chastised, given stripes, endure grief, and be an offering (Isa. 52-53). In this, God demonstrated *His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

What motivated Jesus to endure the cross? (Jn. 14:31; Heb. 12:2)

What joy was on the other side of the cross? (Jn. 17:4-5; Heb. 2:17)

### The Ongoing Plan of Love (1 Jn. 4:19)

Though Jesus' death was primarily to be the atonement for sin, God also used this to instruct us about what His love will cause us to do. God not only wants us to learn and appreciate His love seen in Jesus' death but also to imitate it—even literally if the situation arises (1 Jn. 4:19). Whether or not we face this circumstance, we must let go of our own will and desires and replace them with God's (Gal. 2:20; Rom. 8:13). Every Christian must deny self, accept his cross, and follow Jesus (Matt. 16:24).

Was God's love for us in response to our love for Him?

Is our love for God in response to His love for us?

Beside the inner choice to love God, how else must we respond to His love?

## The End of this Plan of Love

At the final resurrection, as death is completely swallowed up in victory, this particular eternal purpose of God will be fulfilled. His plan and offer to restore man to fellowship with Him will have been completed. Though this plan of love ends, this is not the end of His love. At this time, we will know the love of God in a way we have never experienced.

But, just as God is love, He is also a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29). His mercy and love are not without justice. God has told us that Jesus will return *in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.* (2 Thess. 1:8-10).

Judgment does not contradict God's love, and neither does God's love extinguish judgment. We may struggle to understand this combination of God's character, but we dare not deny it. A denominational pastor's book (Love Wins; Rob Bell) sold millions of copies, declaring the idea that God will punish people for all of eternity for sins to be unacceptable. He accepts the revelation of the love of God and rejects the revelation of the vengeance of God. We may not like or fully understand why the punishment stated in 2 Thessalonians 1:8-10 is what awaits most people, but none of that changes what Jesus and His apostles taught.

- What does 1 John 3:2 tell us about God's future plan?

## God Loves: Him Who Follows Righteousness & Justice (Prov. 15:9) [3]

*The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but He loves him who follows righteousness.* (Prov. 15:9). *He loves righteousness and justice* (Ps. 33:5). The key words in “righteousness” and “justice” are “right” and “just”—qualities of God which He desires for man to add to his own character.

### Righteousness & Justice in Israel

Many of the psalms include the themes of righteousness and justice. Especially when David is the author, we are not surprised to find those subjects on his mind. As king, he was ultimately responsible for leading the nation in righteousness and ensuring justice. In Psalm 11:7, David calls the people’s attention to God as the perfect standard and rewarder of righteousness. In Psalm 33:4-5, David admires and encourages others to notice and praise God because His word is right, His work is truth, and He loves righteousness and justice. And while David could affect the nation somewhat by enforcing justice, he also attempted to persuade his citizens’ thinking by pointing them to the character of God.

Name an occasion where David ignored or demanded justice.

From Psalm 37:28, we learn that because God loves justice, He does not do what?

Jeremiah, who prophesied during times of extreme corruption in civil and spiritual leadership, ensured the leaders and citizens that God exercised “lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight...” (Jer. 9:24). In what ways was God’s lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness being exercised when wicked leaders were in control?

### Righteousness & Justice in Jesus’ Day

When Jesus was on earth, civil and spiritual leaders brought hardship on many people. Instead of focusing His energies on bringing social change by marches, petitions, group protests, or civil revolutions, Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom, trying to persuade men to *seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness* (Matt. 6:33). The apostle Simon, called the Zealot (Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13), was once part of a group seeking to change society back to God’s ideal, even resorting to violence according to man’s record of the history of those days.

When Jesus rebuked leaders who neglected justice, mercy, and faith (Matt. 23:23), His first goal was not to change people by persuading the leaders to change civil laws. Civil righteousness and justice would not result in spiritual righteousness and justice—the opposite is true.

- In John 6:15, what had just happened that contributed to the fervor of immediately making Jesus king?

- What does this reveal about what they imagined about His rule?

### Righteousness & Justice Today

Our society and leaders not only fail to keep righteousness and justice (as we all have), but increasingly they are failing to uphold righteousness and justice as the goal. They may use those words, but because they leave God out of the equation, what they mean by righteousness and justice is very different than what the Bible describes. Taxes and entitlements which encourage extravagance or undermine motivation to work are a reproach to any people. What can bring sweeping changes in a nation? A leader like David who views God as the standard, admires the traits of God, and appeals to the nation to do the same could, but we can barely find a leader who persuades Americans by the reality of God’s existence, much less by His revelation and character.

Many religious groups believe they are equally responsible to meet the physical needs of men, as they are the spiritual needs. For example, in 2006, the head of the U. S. Episcopal Church was asked what her focus as head would be. She replied “Our focus needs to be on feeding people who go to bed hungry, on providing primary education to girls and boys, on healing people with AIDS, on addressing tuberculosis and malaria, on sustainable development. That ought to be the primary focus.” (*Time* July 17, 2006) That was neither the

primary goal of Jesus or any of His churches. For example, in Acts 4:34, why was it only those *among them* who received what was laid at the apostles feet? Why didn't the apostles distribute these things among all the poor in Jerusalem? (Likewise, in Acts 2:45; 6:1) Under Jesus' headship, the family must take care of the members of its family (1 Tim. 5:8), and the church must provide for saints (Acts 4:34; 1 Tim. 5:16; 1 Cor. 16:1). As to other legitimate needs, God teaches each saint to oversee his own funds and give as opportunities arise, instead of turning that responsibility over to the church/elders or other leaders (Eph. 4:28; Gal. 6:10; 1 Tim. 5:8, 16). When each member of the family, church, nation, and world seeks God's ways, righteousness and justice will prevail. With this, God is pleased.

- In our nation, what will compel more people not to seek an abortion: change in U.S. Constitution or their individual conversion to Christ? Why?

- Is it possible for a civil leader to provide spiritual leadership without forcing all citizens to become Christians? If so, how?

## God Loves: Those Who Fear Him (Ps. 147:11) [4]

Much is said in the Bible about fearing the LORD, and more than just a verse or two is needed to have a right understanding of what that fear involves and produces. In Psalm 147:10-11, the psalmist announces that God is not impressed with the strength of the horse or of man but *takes pleasure in those who fear Him*.

Samuel, Saul, & Sacrifice 1 Sam. 15

v1-9 Saul disregards the LORD's command

v15-21 Saul and Samuel discuss what was done. Notice that twice, Saul emphasizes that the sheep and oxen that were spared were going to be sacrificed to God.

v22-23 Most of the time, to sacrifice meant obeying and heeding the LORD, but in this case, the plans for sacrifice involved disobeying the LORD. How did Samuel say God viewed these things?

Similarly, what was and was not being neglected in the days of Hosea? (Hos. 6:6-9)

What made it easy to observe burnt offerings and sacrifices while neglecting mercy and knowledge? What lesson(s) may we learn?

With Fear, Include Obedience (Eccl. 12:13)

This is man's all, whole duty. The whole duty of a car is to transport. When it does this, others benefit from the car and the car itself even benefits (what happens to a car that sits in a garage for years?). The whole duty of a father is to lead his family. When he does so, both he and his family benefit. When our life revolves around our whole duty, not only do other people benefit, but God looks on us with a unique love. God has always intended to share His love with mankind, His unique creation.

What usually happens if we purchase something but do not use it for the purpose for which it was made?

What are some common, mistaken beliefs about man's primary, or whole, duty?

What are some of the results of man using his life without the knowledge of its purpose (his whole duty)?

With Fear, Include Spirit and Truth (Jn. 3:23)

Though Jesus was talking about worship on this occasion, fear begins and exists in our spirit/mind—the reasoning, rational part of us, and truth requires God's revelation. So “spirit and truth” requires cooperation between God and man on any occasion. Only by spirit and truth is the relationship between God and man what God wants and man needs.

How can/does our spirit have the fear of the Lord? (Ps. 34:11)

What was Cornelius missing in Acts 10:1-2: the fear of the LORD, the proper spirit, and/or truth?

With Fear, Include Sincerity and Truth (Josh. 24:14)

As Joshua prepared to die, he reminded Israel of some basic lessons: fear God, serve Him in sincerity and truth, and put away sin. All three of these are connected. Sincerity and truth compel us to put away sin. The fear of the LORD compels us to be sincere—honest with what we know God has said and with our response to Him. The fear of the LORD also informs us of truth. While it is true that God loves all people, based on what we have learned, God has a unique love for people with the fear, sincerity, and truth that He offers.

Give an example of Israel having a degree of fear of the LORD but lacking sincerity.

The book of Judges from beginning to end! 17:5-6, 12

Can someone *ever* be sincere but not know truth?

To what will persistent sincerity ultimately lead?

## God Loves: A Contrite Heart (Ps. 51:16-17; Ezek. 33:11) [5]

*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart--these, O God, You will not despise (Psalms 51:17). Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord GOD, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live' (Ezek. 33:11).*

What does the word “contrite” mean? \_\_\_\_\_

Of what value is a contrite heart? Who benefits if you have a contrite heart? Who hurts if you don't? Is the fact that God loves a contrite heart enough to make it important to you?

### David Understood the Value

King David understood that God hated adultery, lies, and murder, and for a time, he was more committed to those things (and thus, himself) than God. Yet, though he may have ignored it for a while, he never forgot that God loved a contrite heart. When David's commitment to God was again stronger than his commitment to sexual pleasure and cover-up, his heart was contrite, and he wrote the fifty-first psalm.

In Psalm 51:16-17:

David acknowledges that God does not want worship without what?

How is a spirit broken?

Name someone, in the Old or New Testament, who showed they did not have a contrite heart.

How did God restore a contrite heart to David?

Who benefitted from David's contrite heart?

### Jesus Preached the Value

One of the first things that we are told that Jesus preached was repentance (Matt. 4:17). True repentance begins with a change of heart---a contrite heart. In His sermon on the mount, Jesus repeatedly emphasized not only a reformed life but also a contrite heart (Matt. 5:2-3, 24, 28, 44).

What does Jesus teach in Matthew 6 that can only be done with a contrite heart?

What does Jesus teach in Matthew 7 which exposes the lack of a contrite heart in some?

In Matthew 6-7, what are some of the blessings or curses of being with or without a contrite heart?

How did Jesus illustrate God's joy over a contrite heart in the “Lost” parables of Luke 15?

### If It Matters to God...

Man-made religion reveals various extremes. Some view religion as only a matter of the heart and mind---as long as you feel and believe the truth, you are saved and cannot be lost. Others view religion only as a matter of the hands---as long as you do certain things, then it won't eternally matter what you believed or if other parts of your life were corrupt. Neither of these plans please God and without pleasing God, true religion cannot be practiced. Clearly, having a contrite heart matters to God, and if it matters to God...

It must be important (Isa. 55:8-9) While we can understand some reasons why it is important to have a contrite heart, God's wisdom is higher than ours---we will never understand the importance of this to the same depth as God does. What has God said that teaches us some of the reasons why this is important? (Ephesians 4:18; Romans 10:10; Luke 8:11-15; Ezek. 33:11)

It is for our good (Deut. 6:24) The instructions God gave to Israel were for their good. The teachings God has given us are for our good—not just us individually but also all those we influence. When we have and show a contrite heart after we sin, how are these people affected? How are they affected if we do not have such a heart?

- God

- spouse

- children

- the lost

- the church

Conclusion Does it matter to you that God ignores your worship if you come without a contrite heart? Does it matter to you that Jesus emphasized a proper heart among His servants? It matters to God. Does it matter to you?

## God Loves: The Prayer of the Upright (Prov. 15:8) [6]

If asked, what would your children say to the question “What can you do that makes your dad/mom happy?”

What would you say, if asked a similar question about God? Would you say that *the prayer of the upright is His delight*? That’s what Solomon said (Prov. 15:8). In addition to knowing that Jesus prayed, that God expects us to pray, and that prayer “avails much,” have you considered that God loves to hear prayers from the upright?

Hates the sacrifice of the wicked (Prov. 15:8a) [Understanding the sacrifices God hates, helps us to understand the sacrifices He loves]

To whom do wicked people offer sacrifices?

Why would wicked people offer a sacrifice?

Would God have loved or hated the sacrifice of the livestock gathered from the Amelekites, if it was brought to the priests and offered to God? Explain your answer (1 Sam. 15:20-21)

What were two reasons God gave *to you priests who despise My name* (Mal. 1:6-13) for why He rejected the sacrifices they brought to Him?

Occasions and substance of the upright’s prayers

When and about what do you talk to a judge?

When and about what do you talk to your brother or parents?

When and about what do you talk to a doctor?

When and about what do best friends talk?

[After answering these questions, answer them again but consider God in the role of each question (judge, parent, doctor, friend, etc)]

Choose TWO of the roles above and find an example of someone in the Bible praying to God because of His role/work in that area.

If my spouse was the local judge or doctor, how would my marriage be affected if I only spoke to my spouse about things related to their life/work as judge or doctor?

On what occasions do you recall Jesus praying and what impresses you about His prayers?

Read the prayer of the apostles in Acts 4:24-30. What can we learn from this prayer?

## God Loves: The Church By Nourishing (Ephesians 5:25) [7]

Though never married to a woman on earth, Jesus is the model of the love husbands must have for their wives demonstrated in His love for the church. The evidence of God's love for the lost is the same as God's love for the saved—Jesus' suffering and death. His goal in dying was to forgive the world of sin, producing the church but like Israel often did, the world rejects His loving offer. So, while maintaining His love for lost men today, Jesus uniquely loves His church because they uniquely belong to Him.

Ephesians 5:28-29 give two key elements of God-like love: nourish and cherish. In this study, let's notice Jesus' love for the church demonstrated by nourishing the church. (Though we are not taking the time to apply these points and applications to marriage, the point of Ephesians 5 is that Jesus' love is the model of love in marriage. Every point we study could be applied there.)

What does it mean to “nourish” someone?

Jesus nourished/nourishes the church by---

*choosing to deny Himself convenience and ease* Before coming to earth, Jesus never experienced hunger, thirst, fatigue, or physical pain. Even if Jesus had lived a luxurious lifestyle, life on earth still would have been a trial in comparison with heaven. Jesus lived a very simple life—He never owned his own house (Matt. 8:20). He provided for our needs by denying Himself, which is what He expects us to do (Mt. 16:24).

- What other inconveniences did Jesus willingly accept?

- Name some conveniences that could be potential weights (things slowing us down and wearing us down) as we run this race? (read Hebrews 12:1)

Test your love for Christ (and anyone else you claim to love): What are some conveniences I willingly surrender for Him?

*accepting a work which made Him “lower than the angels”* The Word became flesh when He entered a human body. By becoming flesh, He was then “a little lower than the angels.” The nearest parallel I could imagine is for us to choose to leave our human body and enter the body of a dog. Would you want to do that, knowing that dogs are often put on a leash, kept in a small yard, or mistreated in various ways? Though this parallel fails in many ways, it somewhat helps us to understand what Jesus did by becoming flesh. His spirit was still superior to every human and angel (the Son of God), but at the same time He was also lower than the angels and equal to humans (the Son of Man). Why did He do this? To nourish us.

- Why is an angel lower than God?

- Angels cannot be worshiped (Rev. 22:9). Did the fact that Jesus was lower than the angels mean that He was not worthy of worship while in the flesh?

Test your love for Christ (and anyone else you claim to love): What work have I accepted due to my love for Christ that the world views as degrading?

*accepting responsibilities He did not have before* Every person who marries, willingly accepts new responsibilities. They agree to do so because these responsibilities are for the benefit (nourishment) of their spouse. They view the reward as being well-worth the price---Jesus did too. Jesus accepted all the responsibilities that came with being the Savior, Propitiation, Passover lamb, Head, Older Brother, High Priest, etc. to save man from sin.

- What are some of the joys that were before (ahead of) Jesus as He endured the cross? (Heb. 12:2)

Test your love for Christ (and anyone else you claim to love):

What are some responsibilities that every individual is not required to accept but that God intends for some Christians to voluntarily accept?

Some of Jesus' responsibilities were named above (Savior, Head, etc). Who are we as a result of the new responsibilities we accept? (for example: We become a brother or sister to others in Christ's family)

*leading by serving and sacrificing* Jesus is the perfect model for every leader God appointed (government, husbands, pastors/elders). Jesus led by serving and sacrificing. Like sheep, we need a leader so Jesus nourishes us by providing leadership. The cross was the climax of Jesus' willingness to lead by serving. Name another occasion where He showed His leadership by serving.

Test your love for Christ (and anyone else you claim to love):

How does Jesus' example help with the "desire" for the work of a bishop?

Name 1-2 decisions that a bishop must make, and then show how Jesus' example helps in those decisions.

## God Loves: The Church By Cherishing (Ephesians 5:25) [8]

Though never married to a woman on earth, Jesus is the model of the love husbands must have for their wives demonstrated in His love for the church. The evidence of God's love for the lost is the same as God's love for the saved—Jesus' suffering and death. His goal in dying was to forgive the world of sin, producing the church but like Israel often did, the world rejects His loving offer. So, while maintaining His love for lost men today, Jesus uniquely loves His church because they uniquely belong to Him.

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What does it mean to "cherish" someone?

Christ cherished/cherishes the church by--

*telling us of His love* Eph. 5:25 Remember that Christ sent the Holy Spirit, who was taking a message from Jesus and bringing it to the apostles (Jn. 16:13-14). Thus, in Ephesians 5:25, Jesus is telling the church of His love. In our world of constant communication and deception, words sometimes seem empty, but when words come from the Word, they are full of meaning for us to understand for God cannot lie (Ti. 1:2).

- Of what benefit is it to us when we know that someone else values us?

- Read John 10:11-13 and comment on the difference between what the Shepherd and hireling valued and how they showed it.

Test your love for Christ (and anyone else you claim to love): In prayer, do you tell God of your love for Him, His Son, the Spirit?

*telling us of the depth of his love* Is it enough for a spouse to say "I love you" or is it meaningful for him/her to expound upon that by finding something to compare their love to or to express the reasons for the existence and depth of their love? Every wife likes a card that not only has the words "I love you" but has images, poetry, and other things that enhance those three words. Jesus has not only stated His love, He has explained that love in words that both humble and thrill our hearts.

- How does Jesus express the depth of His love for His church (called His sheep, flock) in John 10:11?

- What do these passages teach about the depth of His love?

Luke 15:4-5

Luke 15:8

Luke 15:22-24

Matt. 18:27

Test your love for Christ (and anyone else you claim to love):

- Read at least two of these Psalms and tell what they teach us about loving God: Ps. 18:1; 40:16; 70:4; 116:1; 119:97, 127.

- Though love must include more than just words, of what benefit is expressing the depth of our love to God in prayer?

*living consistent with His words in suffering, death* Words matter, but the credibility of those words is determined by the actions which follow. Before His death, Jesus declared that His love for the sheep was deep enough that He would willingly die for them (Jn. 11:11). When the time came to suffer and die, His love was seen both in His willingness to die and His conduct while He was being killed.

- By dying for us, what was Jesus protecting us from? (Rom. 6:23)

- How is Jesus' love seen in His conduct during the events leading to His death?

Test your love for Christ (and anyone else you claim to love): When we must lose something pleasant or receive something unpleasant as a result of our commitment to Christ, our love for Him is revealed. How did Paul learn to respond to suffering for Christ (2 Cor. 12:9-10)? How did this show his love for Christ?

*praying for us* Is it meaningful to you when someone mentions you in their prayer? In John 17, Jesus offered a general prayer for the unity of all people who believe in Him through the apostles' word. This showed that He valued every believer and desired that they be protected from everything that could undo unity. He cherishes us.

- Beside ruling at the right hand of God, what else does Jesus do (Heb. 7:25)?

Test your love for Christ (and anyone else you claim to love): The content of our prayers reveal what we love-value-cherish. If my prayers regularly focus on physical requests and thanksgiving to the neglect of spiritual requests and thanksgiving, my heart and first love may be leaning in the wrong direction. Choose ANY prayer recorded in the Bible and comment on the content of the prayer regarding physical and spiritual things.

*protecting us from Satan* Any husband who loves his wife will protect her—especially from sin. The man who leaves his wife and exposes her to the extreme temptation of adultery is partially accountable if she follows (Matt. 5:32). Thus, the love of Jesus for the church is evident for *being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted* (Heb. 2:18). Every way and time that He aids us, His love is seen.

Choose one of the pieces of the armor of God and explain how it protects us from Satan. (Eph. 6:11-17)

Test your love for Christ (and anyone else you claim to love): How does Hebrews 10:29 describe people who refuse the protection Jesus offers from Satan?

God is the model of every form of love He expects of us. As spouses, He has provided Jesus as a perfect model of what He expects (Eph. 5:25). As parents, God has revealed Himself as “Father,” in part, because He is the perfect model of what He expects from earthly parents. The love of the Heavenly Father in earthly parents brings harmony, joy, and peace to any home. That love includes correction (chastening).

God teaches before He corrects

God has demonstrated a consistent pattern of interaction with humans. He always teaches what He expects men to know and do, and He teaches the consequences of obedience and disobedience. Often, He has included the lives of others to serve as examples of what He expects and the fruits of obedience and disobedience. Moses did this when instructing the Israelites who would soon enter Canaan (Deut. 27-28).

- What did God teach Adam and Eve before He corrected them? (Gen. 2:15-17)

- How did God correct Adam and Eve? (Gen. 3:9-24)

God corrects consistent with His teaching

Can you think of any occasion in the Bible where God gave instruction and a warning, and after He was disregarded, retracted His original warning and ignored the sin? On a few occasions, God altered the original punishment, but the sin was never overlooked (2 Sam. 12:13). On a few occasions, God brought an unexpected punishment (Acts 5:5, 10; 12:23). Yet, these occasions are rare enough that they can be counted on one or two hands! As a rule demonstrated for thousands of years, God has corrected man precisely as He said He would: Adam and Eve, the days of Noah, history of Israel & Judah, and even today.

- Where is God’s love seen in His correction of Adam and Eve?

- Where is God’s love seen in His correction of Israel and Judah, when He sent them into captivity?

God’s correction today

God chastened Simon the former-sorcerer when Peter reminded him that his heart was not right, he was guilty of wickedness, he was poisoned by bitterness, he was bound by iniquity, and he needed forgiveness. Simon’s conscience was pricked when he first heard the gospel, and it was pricked again (Acts 8:21-24). Paul warned the Corinthians that he was willing to come *with a rod* (1 Cor. 4:21; 2 Cor. 13:2). What rod? Sharp words (2 Cor. 13:10). Sometimes, it is our own heart that condemns us as our knowledge of the truth and the knowledge our life conflicts (1 Jn. 3:20). *My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest His correction* (Prov. 3:11). God definitely corrects us by His word.

God also corrects us by the events of life. Whether it is by faithful brethren who separate themselves from us because we decided to walk disorderly (2 Thess. 3:6, 15) or other physical consequences of our sinful decisions that seem routine to us (strife in Abraham’s life after marrying Hagar), God is actively trying to bring us back.

- Name examples of chastening in Revelation 2-3.

- Read Hebrews 12:5-11 and answer these questions

1. Find three other words that mean the same as *chasten*, in these verses.

2. What common reactions are we warned against?

3. What are the results of God’s chastening?

4. When does God’s chastening produce the fruit of righteousness?

5. What does God's chastening yield in His sons who are not trained by it?

6. Name a Bible character who was chastened and either was or was not trained by it. Discuss what the chastening involved.

- What do Psalm 141:5; Prov. 27:6 add to a study of God's chastening?

- Though this lesson is not focused on parental chastening, name at least one lesson parents can draw from a study of this subject.

Conclusion As the song says "Where love is in the home..." (there's harmony, contentment reigns, there's happiness). From God we learn, there can be no love (and thus no lasting harmony, contentment, or happiness) without chastening.

## God Loves: Those Who Deal Truthfully (Prov. 11:1; 12:22) [10]

God deals truthfully when speaking about the weather (Gen. 8:22; 9:11), punishments or rewards (Matt. 25:46), worship (Jn. 4:23), or ideas (Jn. 17:17). Man often views dealing truthfully as more important on some occasions than other occasions and so becomes comfortable lying on occasions he considers to be of less importance. Solomon taught that God “delights” in those who deal truthfully—a lesson needed both then and now.

In the home No home can run smoothly if the members of the family cannot trust each other, but God loves the home where each member deals truthfully with each other. In this home, questions and answers are exchanged in peace without requiring intense interrogation, requests are made with confidence that the needs and feelings of the one requesting will be considered in the final decision, and promises are made and kept. Sadly, not all homes run on truth.

God rejected the Jews who dealt treacherously with their *wives by covenant* (Mal. 2:14). What is treachery?

In what ways do people today deal treacherously with their spouse?

Name two specific areas wherein the virtuous woman dealt truthfully. (Prov. 31:10-31)

What is the relationship between love and dealing truthfully?

In business The *balance* and *weight* of Proverbs 11:1 refer to business transactions. How exhausting a shopping trip would be if you could not trust that a bag marked as being five pounds was *really* five pounds. And today, sellers have to do a mini-background check before accepting a personal check because so many people have abused this trust-based method of payment. Business will always reflect the morals of the nation. Wages, bonuses, time-off definitions (sick, vacation, personal, etc), prices, and job applications all require that participants deal truthfully. When that is the rule, and not the exception, this aspect of righteousness will exalt a nation and economy, but sin will bring reproach.

What word does Solomon use to identify God’s reaction to dishonest business practices?

Identify and discuss the forms of dishonesty identified by Amos (Amos 5:10-12).

While greed typically motivates dishonesty in business, discuss why dealing truthfully will often result in greater wealth.

In what way(s) did the rich fool deal falsely with (deceive) himself? (Lk. 12:16-21)

In the churches By killing Ananias and Sapphira for lying, God showed that He expected Christians to deal truthfully with each other (Acts 5). When some of the churches in Asia did not use truth to deal with internal and external error, Jesus personally warned them that they were provoking Him to anger (Rev. 2:14-16; 3:16-18). Whether it is a deacon counting the collection, an evangelist or elder receiving wages to do their work, or the church knowing of someone’s ongoing sin, the Lord loves those who deal truthfully with each other.

Why does a church who ignores sin among them fail to deal truthfully with that one? (2 Cor. 6:14-18)

When leaders communicate well with those they lead, how does this pattern of truthful communication benefit both the leaders and the congregation?

In what other way(s) is it important for us to deal truthfully with each other as a church?

## God Loves: A Cheerful Giver (2 Cor. 9:7) [11]

God's commands are always for man's good, and thus *His commands are not burdensome* (Deut. 6:24; 1 Jn. 5:3). Since *It is more blessed to give than to receive*, God blesses us by teaching us to be givers (Acts 20:35). Someone who grudgingly gives is benefitted in some ways, and someone who gives out of their abundance and thus feels neither joy nor sorrow in giving is more blessed than when they receive. But the true value comes to each one who learns to be a cheerful giver.

2 Corinthians 9:7 In Context When Paul talks to the Corinthians about being cheerful givers, he had been discussing a particular occasion of giving—the *ministering to the saints* (v1). On the first day of every week, the Corinthians were collecting funds so that upon Paul's arrival the funds would be ready for their intended purpose (1 Cor. 16:2). This is consistent with the practice of Christians from the beginning who continued steadfastly in the fellowship (Acts 2:42). Strong gives one definition of *fellowship* as “pecuniary benefaction.” {“Pecuniary” is related to money and benefaction means “benefit, a charitable donation”} This fellowship was laid at the apostles' feet and distributed when the need arose (Acts 2:44-45; 4:37). In Philippians, the same Greek word (*koinonia*) is translated “fellowship” (1:15) and “shared” (4:15). When they *shared* with Paul, they *fellowshipped* with Paul.

- How does understanding the definition “fellowship” to include the church's money and its use guide the church in deciding whether to give its funds to needy people who are not Christians?

- What is God's plan for meeting the needs of unbelievers who are poor?

As the Corinthians weekly prepared the gift and the fellowship of the ministering of the saints (2 Cor. 8:4), Paul urges them to bountifully sow with the confidence that they would bountifully reap the fruit of righteousness (2 Cor. 9:10; Phil. 4:17). This passage is often abused by people claiming that if you give money, you will receive more money in return.

- What are some ways we reap the fruit of righteousness by giving bountifully?

Paul told each one of them to give *as he purposes in his heart*. Planning to give makes the giving more meaningful because of the thinking that has been invested. That's true of any gift. When we have researched to find just the right gift for someone we love, worked to save the money for it, and then can present that gift, we may be as excited to give it as they are to receive it. That is the reaction God is seeking from us as we give, and it comes in part as a result of having purposed (intended) to give.

- Find two verses that help us plan in the process of purposing (intending) in our heart to give.

- If I feel “neutral” as I give (neither cheerful nor resentful), what is possibly missing in my giving?

To our family In 1 Timothy 5:4, Timothy is told to teach children and grandchildren to *show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God*. Sometimes we repay someone simply as a business transaction, and the joy is theirs because they received interest beside the principle. When our parents need financial help, God orders us to “repay” our parents and views this to be equally as important as our duty to give for the church's work. Neglecting this duty makes us *worse than an unbeliever* (1 Tim. 5:8).

- How did the scribes and Pharisees view giving for the work of the Temple and giving to their parents? (Matt. 15:4-6)

- What challenges might a need like this bring, either to the parent in need of help or the child(ren) who are responsible to help? What Scriptures will help overcome these challenges?

- What joy is there in giving to our family?

## God Loved: Israel [12]

Though God's relationship with Israel is generally misunderstood today, God clearly favored them in certain ways in the past. Why did He favor them, as a nation, and what were the lasting results of that favor?

God loved Abraham first In Genesis 12:3, God promised to bless all nations through Abraham which we later learn means God was sending the Savior through Abraham (Acts 3:25-26). The unique relationship that Genesis shows God had with Abraham was motivated by God's love for mankind who needed a Savior from sin. Because Abraham accepted God's love and offered his love to God through living by faith, God chose to uniquely bless Abraham's descendants (Gen. 22:18). What better way can you show your love to someone than by blessing their children? Any right-thinking parent would prefer that someone bless their children rather than themselves. Thus, God showed His love for Abraham by blessing Israel, but in the bigger picture, God was showing His love for mankind by blessing Abraham.

1. What does Genesis 18:19 tell us that God expected of Abraham?
2. Abraham was the friend of God. Was that only because God loved Abraham? (Js. 2:23)
3. Does God consider everyone He loves His friend? Why or why not? (Js. 4:4; Jn. 15:14)

God loved Jacob Later, God chose to love Jacob and not Esau (Rom. 9:13). This love was not a decision about who God would spiritually accept but was a decision about which family Jesus would come from. God decided to give this blessing to Jacob, not Esau. The love/hate of this verse relates to the "Seed promise" and not to the constant promise that *the just shall live by faith*.

1. If Esau had chosen to be a friend of God, instead of profane (Heb. 12:16), would God have accepted him?
2. Though God in one way "loved Jacob and hated Esau," did God love Esau in any way? Explain.

God loved Israel As Israel prepared to enter Canaan, Moses reminded them that *because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them; and He brought you out of Egypt with His Presence, with His mighty power* (Deut. 4:37). Several more times, God reminded Israel of the basis of His love for them and reminded them what it was NOT based on. Read the following verses and write down the things that were and were not involved in God's love for Israel.

1. Deut. 7:7-8
2. Deut. 9:4-6
3. Why was it important for them to understand the reasons why God loved them?
4. Name two examples that Moses gave Israel in Deuteronomy 9, to remind them that God's love did not eliminate the possibility of punishment.

God loves all people and nations When the gospel was first spread, the Jews connected God's favor too tightly to their nationality and/or national religion (Acts 15:1). Many of them were willfully ignorant that God's favor for Israel was motivated by His love for all man (Rom. 10:3; 1:16). Forgetting God's purpose and plan of His love for Israel, they misunderstood His love and relationship with Israel. Today, the idea persists that God continues to uniquely favor Israel. Many people believe that Israel has a right to certain lands because of God's covenant with Israel, forgetting that God gave Israel that land conditionally and promised to remove them from the land if they rejected His covenant, as they did many times—most noticeably in rejecting the Christ (Deut. 28:21; Acts 2:23). Today, God's only *holy nation* and *royal priesthood* is *the people of God* --Christians (1 Pet. 2:9-10; 4:16).

1. How has God's love for Israel changed?
2. What does Galatians 3:28-29 teach us about the availability of God's salvation for various nations?
3. What did Peter finally learn in Acts 10:34-35?
4. How does Satan tempt us to show partiality today?

## God Loves: The Son [13]

Because love is involved in everything God does, God not only says that love is what He does but even goes so far as to say that love is what He is, though love is not the only trait highlighted in this way (1 Jn. 4:8; 1:5; Heb. 12:29; 1 Cor. 10:13). Among the objects of God's love is His Son. Let's learn everything we can about the love of the Father for the Son.

### Announced by the Father at Jesus' baptism and transfiguration Matt. 3:17; 17:5

God rarely has directly spoken publicly so the few times that He has are worth noting. He did so at Jesus' baptism and at His transfiguration. The message is the same on both occasions-- *This My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased* (Mark and Luke record God saying *You are My Beloved Son...* Mk. 1:11; Lk. 3:22; at the transfiguration He added *Hear Him*). This is no mere emotional outburst but is a strategically-timed announcement, allowing all who heard or heard of this occasion to know that Jesus has God's approval. Jesus' baptism was one of the first occasions where public attention was drawn to Jesus during His adulthood. Jesus' transfiguration was a private event, witnessed by only three others and at that time kept private.

Both of these events gave the witnesses compelling evidence which they used to persuade others that Jesus was chosen by God. John never forgot what he heard and used that lesson to convince his disciples that *He must increase* (Jn. 3:30, 35). Peter cited what he heard as evidence that he was not spreading fables but facts (2 Pet. 1:17-18).

- Beside these occasions when God announced His love, how else could the Father's love for the Son be known?

- What truths can we know and spread with the knowledge that the Father loves the Son?

- What errors can we refute today, knowing that the Father loves the Son?

### Affirmed & Shared by the Spirit

*I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me,...* (John 16:12-14)

*... when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets:* (Ephesians 3:4-5)

The fact that the Father spoke at Jesus' baptism and transfiguration would be lost to history if the Holy Spirit had not provided a trustworthy record of those events. The Holy Spirit delivered the things that glorify Jesus to the holy apostles and prophets, and Scripture is the record of these things. Therefore, every verse which affirms the Father's love for the Son is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit. For this, He deserves our gratitude.

- How did the Holy Spirit identify Jesus in these verses: Colossians 1:13; Ephesians 1:6?

- What about the Holy Spirit's love for Jesus? It is certainly not as well-known as the Father's love for the Son is known, but is there any evidence that the Spirit loves Jesus? (see Gen. 1:27; Mt. 3:16; 28:19; Jn. 14:26; 16:13-14; any other verses?)

### Known by the Son

I once had a friend whose father had never told her “I love you.” She never doubted that her father loved her but never hearing it clearly sent a confusing signal. At Jesus’ baptism and transfiguration, Jesus heard that His Father loved Him, as did everyone else there. Jesus used this fact as proof that He was not working apart from, much less against, the Father as the Jews thought and claimed (John 5:20).

- For what purpose does Jesus include the Father’s love for Him in His prayer (John 17:24)?
  
- What explanation did Jesus give for the Father loving Him in John 15:9-10?
  
- Because Jesus accepted His Father’s love, He responded to that love. How did He respond in these verses?  
Jn. 8:29  
  
Lk. 22:42
  
- What lessons are there in the love of the Father for the Son, for families today?

### God loves Jesus--Do you?

Since love is to be the motivator for everything we do, we need to learn all we can of this love (Mt. 22:37-39). While our love for Jesus will never be as deep as the Father’s and Spirit’s love, it must be the same kind of love. Like the Father we must tell Jesus of our love for Him. Like the Spirit, we must tell others of our love for Jesus while also cooperating with and glorifying Him in the world. In a general way, this answers whether we love Jesus.

Conclusion Everyone today seems to be very interested in love but not the love that God has revealed. The love of God for Jesus is the purest form of love. Let us ask for, learn of, and practice this pure kind of love.

## God Loves: The Father [14]

God loves the Father. That may not be the most common way of stating this, but it is true. “The Word” is God, and the Holy Spirit is God (Jn. 1:1; Mt. 28:19), so if the Bible teaches that the Son and Spirit love the Father, then we can know for sure that God loves the Father. Does the Bible teach this?

### Jesus loves the Father

*But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do.* (John 14:31) Jesus declared His love for the Father in both word and deed. When He said this, He was making some final preparations before His coming death. No doubt every apostle would have said “I also love the Father,” but were any of them ready to die for the commandments of the Father? Not yet.

Though the death of Jesus would confuse the apostles, Jesus is letting them know that what would soon happen, in part, involves the plans and commands of the Father. Jesus wanted His willingness to die to be a lesson for them and the world that *I love the Father* (Jn. 14:31; Matt. 26:39; Lk. 22:42).

- List as many ways as you can find by which Jesus’ love for the Father is known (using the verses listed above, any others you can find, and these: Jn. 8:29; 9:4; Lk. 6:12).

- How will my family know that I love the Father?

### The Spirit loves the Father

Some things which we learn about the Father and Son are equally true about the Holy Spirit because He is also God. Since God is love, the Holy Spirit is love. Though His love may be talked about less than the love of Jesus or the Father, His love is present.

Knowing that the Spirit is love may explain why we know less about Him. Since He is the One who delivered Scripture, it might be a surprise that He is talked about less than the Father and Son. Some people, if writing a book about their family, would be tempted to give themselves the place of prominence in the writings, but the Holy Spirit had no thought of competition in His work of recording God’s work among men. He revealed enough for us to know Him as God and His participation in the plan of man’s redemption (Matt. 28:19; Ti. 3:5; Heb. 2:4). Yet, like Jesus, He does not claim His work to be His work *alone*, and in His own way lets the world know that He loves the Father.

Like Jesus, the Holy Spirit was not offended to do the work of a messenger sent from the Father even though He was equal with the Father as God (Jn. 14:26; 15:26; Mt. 28:19). The Father sent Him to be “The Helper” or “The Comforter” who would testify of and glorify Jesus (John 15:26; 16:14). Every word that praises the love and might of the Father was written by men *as they were moved by the Holy Spirit* (2 Pet. 1:21). It is certain that the Spirit loves the Father.

- How do we know that the Spirit loves the Father?

- Name some occasions, whether listed above or not, where the Father and Spirit worked together. What do those occasions teach us about the Spirit’s love for the Father?

- What can we learn and use from the Spirit’s love for the Father that will aid us in working together as a local church?

God loves the Father--do you?

The fact that He is known as “The Father” implies that He deserves our love. The words and actions of Jesus and the Holy Spirit instruct us in how to love our Father. Their love for Him resulted in rich blessings being available to mankind. If we will learn from the Son and Spirit how to love the Father, we can also be a source of blessing to the world. Let’s think about how to do that--

- Name a lesson we learn from Jesus about loving the Father and give an example of how we can imitate it.
  
- Name a lesson we learn from the Spirit about loving the Father and give an example of how we can imitate it.
  
- What blessings can come to the world if we will love the Father?

**Conclusion** We learn the depth of the commitment that love requires by learning of Jesus’ love for the Father. By keeping His Father’s commandments, the door to all spiritual blessings was opened to all the world. That’s the power of love, and it is deeper than any movie or song. The Spirit’s love for the Father caused Him to fill a vital role in ensuring that the Father’s plan of salvation would be preserved on earth, again making many blessings available to all the world. Thus, the love of the Son and Spirit for the Father has resulted in blessings for all the world. If we will love the Father like the Son and Spirit do, the blessings will flow to all around us. Does that mean anything to you?

If we will know that the Father and Son love the Holy Spirit, then we *must* infer it because it is nowhere stated in Scripture. Can we be *sure* that God has implied His love for the Holy Spirit in Scripture? (Though this is not the theme of our studies, this is a good way to see whether God ever reveals truth by implying something He never plainly said).

### The Father loves the Holy Spirit

Admittedly, we are told the least about this relationship. Rarely are They mentioned without Jesus also being included. The cooperation of the Father and Spirit at Jesus' baptism shows that they shared a mutual goal. The Father and Spirit decided what would happen that day—it was no coincidence that They were present together.

Maybe the strongest expression of the Father's love for the Spirit that we know of is the great trust that the Father had in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is often said to be sent by the Father. The Spirit was entrusted with the work of leading the prophets (2 Pet. 1:21), signaling the coming of the *last days* (Acts 2:1-3, 16-17), working most closely with the apostles (Mt. 10:20; Acts 1:4), and His role in salvation and the new way of life is not ignored (Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 6:11; Ti. 3:6). Knowing that the gospel is of great importance to the Father, we can reach no other conclusion other than this: The Father loves the Spirit, in part for His work of delivering the message of hope. To better understand this relationship, we will have to see it for ourselves in heaven!

- Can you find any other relationship in the Bible where love was indicated by trust?

- While love can exist without trust, what effect does trust have on love? (Prov. 25:19; 30:5; Ps. 5:11)

### Jesus loves the Holy Spirit

Jesus and the Spirit share some similarities in their work. In John 14:16, Jesus said that the Father would send “another Helper.” *Another*—who was the first Helper the Father sent? Jesus. Jesus spoke highly of the future work of the Holy Spirit—*He will teach you all things ... He will guide you into all truth* (Jn. 14:26; 16:13). Also, what Jesus says of the Holy Spirit, He had said of Himself. Compare these verses and describe the similarities between Jesus' and the Spirit's work:

Jn. 14:26; 6:39

Jn. 16:13; 12:49

Jn. 16:13; 8:25; 15:15

Jn. 16:14; 17:4

Rev. 2:1, 7, 8, 11, 12, 17, 18, 29

The many similarities in the work and goals of Jesus and the Spirit reveals that they speak the same thing, are of one mind, and of one judgment—the same unity that the Father and Son share (Jn. 17:21). Jesus was wholly devoted to this work, even to death. Do you think He would pass a significant part of that work to just *anyone*? The fact that He entrusted this work to the Holy Spirit tells us the depth to which Jesus knew and trusted the Holy Spirit. Cooperation and trust between two like-minded Beings—sounds like a close relationship doesn't it? Sounds like Jesus loved the Holy Spirit.

### God loves the Holy Spirit—do you?

We live in a world that gives the Holy Spirit credit for things He does not participate in---the writing of creeds, teachings which contradict what He has already revealed, giving personal information or an inclination during routine life and decisions, etc. Thus many of these people “feel closer” to the Holy Spirit because of these things when in reality He has had no part in them. The relationship these people feel is built upon mistaken ideas. However, when we do understand and dwell on what the Holy Spirit does for us, our commitment to (love for) Him will grow—

2 Pet. 1:21 Discuss the role of prophecy for us today (such as Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, Daniel 2, Micah 5:2) and how it should deepen our love for the Holy Spirit.

1 Cor. 6:11 Discuss the spiritual benefit attributed to the Holy Spirit here. Does the Holy Spirit play a secondary, or minor, role in our receiving forgiveness? (Read Hebrews 9:14)

Galatians 5:22-26 Discuss why these things are called “the fruit of the Spirit,” what role they play for us today (in our life or our home or the church), and how this should deepen our love for the Spirit.

Though the Spirit never says “If you love me, keep My commandments,” is obeying the Holy Spirit essential to loving Him? Explain your answer.

### Conclusion

The Holy Spirit deserves our love and attention as much as the Father and Son. They have given Him their love. Let us learn how They did so and practice what we learn.