

UNIT 1: The Attributes of God

Section 19: God's Love

Assigned Reading:
A. W. Pink – The Attributes of God
The Love of God

Introduction:

In understanding God's Goodness, we've now spent a few weeks discussing God's Righteousness, Justice, and Wrath. We turn our attention this morning to investigating God's Love. In coming weeks we will look at God's Grace, Mercy, Patience, and Faithfulness, which some theologians consider further descriptions or expressions of God's Love. In our day, no attribute of God is more spoken of than this one, and sadly no attribute is done more harm today than this one... Many of our day and age have neglected or avoided the implications of large portions of scripture and therefore their understandings of other portions are skewed. If you will remember back to our discussion of "simplicity" – God is not a composite, He is His attributes. Therefore, each attribute ends up describing the other attributes... You won't come to a rightful conclusion regarding God's Love if you have neglected to know His righteousness, eternity, truth, etc. While our world is obsessed with love, unfortunately this obsession is rarely after the biblical definition of the word. Over the next two weeks, we'll spend time defining love by the biblical standard, explaining what is meant by "God is love," and elucidating the implications of the fact that God is "loving."

Q1: *What is LOVE?*

Q2: *How does God describe and demonstrate His love?*

Q3: *Is love God's chief attribute?*

Outline:

I. Defining Terms...

A. Love

1. ENGLISH

- a. Our English word "love" suffers from being greatly "ambiguous." We use the word love to communicate many different types of ideas...
- b. **Dictionary:** (1) Intense affection and warm feeling for another (2) strong sexual desire for another person (3) a strong fondness or enthusiasm (4) A beloved person (5) a zero score in tennis (6) correction
- c. **Thesaurus:** Adoration, affection, delight, enjoyment, desire, intimacy, friendship, passion, priority, etc.
- d. **Culver**, "Love is exceedingly difficult to mention, in times like ours, without danger of misinterpretation. The physical passion of the mutual attraction of the sexes seems to be such an absorbing interest of our times that this universally experienced and fascinating form of love tends to exclude all other forms of love whenever the word is spoken."
- e. **Pink**, "There are many today who talk about the love of God, who are total strangers to the God of love. The Divine love is commonly regarded as a species of amiable weakness, a sort of good-natured indulgence; it is reduced to a mere sickly sentiment, patterned after human emotion. Now the truth is that on this, as on everything else,

our thoughts need to be formed and regulated by what is revealed thereon in Holy Scripture.”

- f. In order to understand what meaning is being conveyed by the word we must look to context as well as “precising definitions.”
 - g. Some help is provided us through a study of the Hebrew and Greek terms that we translate into “love...”
 - h. An immediate observation regarding the difference between the world’s love and the biblical model of love: Secular love is more passive than active – the love often spoken of or depicted in movies is that of someone “falling in love” (an emotional response that just comes over someone). Biblical love stresses the active side of love – we are called to love regardless of feeling, and oftentimes in spite of the way we are treated – We are called to “love our enemies” – does one fall in love with an enemy?
 - i. For this reason, Biblical love flows out of WHO we are... We must be born again (saved) to experience the fullness of God’s love for us, and be filled with it that we can pour out that love to others – **Rom 5:5**
2. **HEBREW:**
- a. אָהַב – love to God or humans... (**Deut 5:10, 6:5, 7:9; Ps 119:47,48,97...**)
 - b. אָהַב – to be attached to, to love... (**Deut 7:7, 13...**)
 - c. אָהַב – lovingkindness, unfailing love, loyalty... (**Exodus 34:6-7; Deut 5:10, 7:9, 12; Hosea 2:21; Jonah 4:2, Micah 6:8...**)
 - d. **Note:** Scripture references abound... no where near “exhaustive” lists given here.
3. **GREEK:**
- a. **e[ro]** – originally used to denote “sexual love” ... This was the name of a Greek deity and denoted sensual indulgences... Later was used to describe “mystical encounters” as Plato and Aristotle tried to remove the sensual overtones... This word is not used in the Gr NT...
 - b. **fi[lo]** – “brotherly love,” friendliness, term used to describe the relationship between friends... inclination prompted by sense and emotion... Love by feeling...
 - c. **ajgavph** – “unconditional love,” to place 1st in one’s affections, indicates a sense of preference and affection, love founded in admiration, veneration, or esteem... Love by choice...
 - d. **GREAT EXAMPLE TEXT:**
 - (1) **John 21:15-19** So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me [ἀγαπᾶς με] more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You [φιλω σε]." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." ¹⁶ He said to him again a second time, "Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me [ἀγαπᾶς με]?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You [φιλω σε]." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon, *son* of John, do you love [φιλεῖς με] Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love [φιλεῖς με] Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love [φιλω σε] You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep. ¹⁸ "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and

bring you where you do not wish to go." ¹⁹ Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me!"

(2) **Why the difference in "love's?"** – ἀγαπάω vs φιλέω

(3) **Meaning of Peter's grief?**

- Grieved because Jesus asked him three times (same meaning of each verb)
- Grieved because the third time reminded him of his betrayal (3 times)
- Grieved because on **lit. the third** Jesus asked if Peter *even* "phileoed" Him

B. *God is Loving*

1. **Pink**, "The only reason why God loves any is found in His own sovereign will: "The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: but *because* the Lord loved thee" (**Deut. 7:7,8**). God has loved His people from everlasting, and therefore nothing of the creature can be the cause of what is found in God from eternity. He loves *from* Himself: "according to His own purpose" (**2 Tim. 1:9**)."
2. **Ryrie**, "Love seeks good for the object loved."
3. **Packer**, "God's love is an exercise of his goodness toward individual sinners whereby, having identified himself with their welfare, he has given His Son to be their Savior, and now brings them to know and enjoy Him in a covenant relation."
4. **Erickson**, "God's love may be thought of as His eternal giving or sharing of Himself. As such, love has always been present among the members of the Trinity, even before there were any created beings."
5. **Grudem**, "God's love means that God eternally gives of Himself to others."

C. *The Testimony of the Scriptures*

1. **Love between Father and Son...**

- a. **Matthew 3:17** and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."
- b. **John 3:35** "The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand."
- c. **John 17:24** "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world."
- d. **John 14:31** but so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me. Get up, let us go from here."
- e. **Grudem**, "The love between the Father and the Son also presumably characterizes their relationship with the Holy Spirit, even though it is not explicitly mentioned. This eternal love of the Father for the Son, the Son for the Father, and of both for the Holy Spirit makes heaven a world of love and joy because each person of the Trinity seeks to bring joy and happiness to the other two."

2. **God is Love**

- a. **I Jn 4:8** The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. – also **4:16**
- b. ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν
- c. **Sproul**, "If we can reverse the two sides of the equation, then we can conclude that love is God. This could legitimize every conceivable heresy, including my own deification. If I have love, then I must have God or actually be God."

- d. **Tozer**, “Equating love with God is a major mistake which has produced much unsound religious philosophy and has brought forth a spate of vaporous poetry completely out of accord with the Holy Scriptures and altogether of another climate from that of historic Christianity... Love is something true of God but it is not God.”
- e. **Ryrie**, “The absence of the article before ‘love’ indicates that this is the very nature of God. The presence of the article before God shows that the statement is not reversible; it cannot read ‘Love is God.’”
- f. **Throughout the history of humanity**, there has been the sinful impulse to “deify worldly definitions of love” – from polytheistic temple prostitution to man’s lustful ambition in sexual perversions...
- g. *It is a significantly different thing to say “My God is Love” vs “Love is my god.”*
- h. **Some have exalted this statement above all other scriptures... making God’s primary/chief attribute “love” ...**
- (1) In response, we need to remember there are other statements like this one describing directly what God is:
 - **John 4:24** "God is spirit [πνεῦμα ὁ θεός], and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."
 - **2 Corinthians 1:18** But as **God is** faithful [πιστὸς δὲ ὁ θεός], our word to you is not yes and no. (see also **1 Cor 1:9, 10:13**)
 - **Hebrews 12:29** for our **God is** a consuming fire [ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν πῦρ καταναλίσκον].
 - **James 2:19** You believe that **God is** one [εἷς ἐστὶν ὁ θεός]. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. (see also **Gal 3:20**)
 - **1 John 1:5** This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that **God is Light** [ὁ θεὸς φῶς ἐστὶν], and in Him there is no darkness at all. – *We wouldn’t say “light is God”*
 - (2) Also, we must remember our discussion of the “simplicity” of God. He is not an amalgamation/compounded being, having 1 part righteousness, 1 part love, 1 part omnipotence, etc. Better said, God IS His perfections/attributes! Each attribute serves as a “lens/perspective” to view his other attributes...
 - (3) **Sproul** does a wonderful job of laying this out in “Loved by God” – God’s love is an immutable love, an eternal love, an omnipotent love, a holy love, etc.
 - (4) **Pink** follows a similar pattern in “The Attributes of God”...
 - (5) **Tozer**, “From God’s other known attributes we may learn much about His love. We can know, for instance, that because God is self-existent, His love had no beginning; because He is eternal, His love can have no end; because He is infinite, it has no limit; because He is holy, it is the quintessence of all spotless purity; because He is immense, His love is an incomprehensible vast, bottomless, shoreless sea before which we kneel in joyful silence and from which the loftiest eloquence retreats confused and abashed.” And yet we make it our endeavor to express this inexpressible truth! “I can no more do justice to that awesome and wonder-filled theme than a child can grasp a star. Still, by reaching toward the star the child may call attention to it and even indicate the direction one must look to see it. So, as I stretch my heart toward the high, shining love of God, someone who has not before known about it may be encouraged to look up and have hope.”

II. Discussing God's Love...

A. God's love for mankind

1. Common Grace

- a. All of mankind experiences the wonderful goodness of God via common grace...
- b. **Matthew 5:44-45** "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your **Father** who is in **heaven**; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous.
- c. Also, every moment an unbeliever is permitted to live is a demonstration of God's goodness in forbearance...

2. Special Grace

- a. The children of God have experienced this special grace of redemption!
- b. **Grudem**, "The self-giving that characterizes the Trinity finds clear expression in God's relationship to mankind, and especially to sinful men."
- c. **Culver**, God's love found a way to redeem us, "not however at the expense of His truth and holiness. The 'expense' was the life of God's only begotten Son, not at the expense of God's holiness, justice and truth."
- d. **1 John 4:10** In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.
- e. **Romans 5:8** But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.
- f. **John 3:16** "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.
- g. **Galatians 2:20** "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

B. Beware of the heresy of Universalism...

1. This grows out of an unbalanced concept of the attributes of God. God's perfection/attribute of love does not operate in isolation from His other perfections/attributes.
2. Universalism contradicts direct statements of scripture – see "**Wrath of God**" notes.
3. **Love and Hate in God...**
 - a. Some say "God hates the sin, but loves the sinner.." But it is not the sin God sends to hell, but the sinner...
 - b. **Romans 9:10-13** And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived *twins* by one man, our father Isaac; ¹¹ for though *the twins* were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to *His* choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, ¹² it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER." ¹³ Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."
 - c. **Luke 14:26** "If anyone comes to Me, and does not **hate** his own **father** and **mother** and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.
 - d. **We know elsewhere** we are called to honor father and mother, love our children, love our wives, respect our husbands, etc... We are even called to love those who hate us!

- e. **These reflect Hebrew idiom** – simply communicates preference & priority...
- f. **Jacob received mercy, Esau received judgment...**
- g. When people are told of God's unconditional love for them, often what is assumed is that God accepts them no matter what they do or how they live... this is NOT the gospel message... the gospel message is REPENT and BELIEVE in Jesus! Even God's Love is "conditioned" by Who He is...
 - (1) **Culver**, "It is incorrect to say that God's love is unconditional, for it is conditioned by His holiness of being and His love of Himself – i.e. by truth. He did not need a world to have a sufficient object of love. God loves the world of mankind because we bear His image. His love is holy, designed fully to restore that image but also true, in that our sinfulness is taken into account."
 - (2) **Here we see the necessity of the cross for our redemption!**
- 4. **Although**, it is quite proper to say that our love for God is to be unconditional... **Sproul**, "There is no condition God must meet before we are under obligation to love Him with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. He is altogether worthy of that love, and every creature who owes his very existence to his Creator and who lives and moves and has his being in that Creator owes the honor and esteem that is inherent in His eternal perfection to the Creator."

C. *God's children have experienced God's love...*

1. **2 Thessalonians 2:13** But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.
2. Having been saved, we have come to know the Love of God... it casts out fear...
3. **1 John 4:18** There is no **fear** in **love**; but perfect **love** casts out **fear**, because **fear** involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in **love**.
4. **This is NOT to say there is not a "holy reverence" for the Lord... this abides. But it is to say that we have been redeemed from the curse, and are no longer under the wrath of God – payment has been made in full by Jesus' sacrifice!**
5. **Tozer**, "If nothing in us can win Thy love, nothing in the universe can prevent thee from loving us. Thy love is uncaused and undeserved. Thou art Thyself the reason for the love wherewith we are loved... Then love will cast out fear; and our troubled hearts will be at peace, trusting not in what we are but in what Thou has declared Thyself to be."
6. **Application:** We don't want to assuage fears of the Holy Judgment of God apart from individuals repenting and trusting in Jesus Christ as Lord! It is the love of God that casts out fear... we ought not "short-circuit" this process!
7. **See Jn 17** – *We are love gifts between the Father and the Son...*
8. *We often think of love as what occurs when someone makes much of us... but this definition would fail to adequately explain God's love. God's love is not seen in His making much of us, but in His giving of Himself to us – making much of Himself in us! We who are called to demonstrate God's love must also make much of God, and call others to do the same! III) Grand Canyon – greatest time, feel least significant...*

D. *God's children are to manifest God's love*

1. **1 John 4:19** We love, because He first loved us.
2. **1 John 2:15** Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

3. **Matthew 22:37-39** And He said to him, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND." ³⁸ "This is the great and foremost commandment. ³⁹ "The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'
 - a. **Who is my neighbor?**
 - b. **Luke 10:29-37** But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰ Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. ³¹ "And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² "Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ "But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, ³⁴ and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on *them*; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ "On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.' ³⁶ "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' *hands*?" ³⁷ And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."
4. **1 John 5:3** For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.
5. **John 15:13** "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.
6. **Matthew 5:43-48** "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous. ⁴⁶ "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing *than others*? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.
7. **There is NOTHING we can do that is ABOVE the call of duty...**
 - a. All obedience rendered to God is simply what He is due!
 - b. **Luke 17:7-10** "Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come immediately and sit down to eat'? ⁸ "But will he not say to him, 'Prepare something for me to eat, and *properly* clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink'? ⁹ "He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? ¹⁰ "So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done *only* that which we ought to have done.'"