

The Love of God  
Rom 8.38-39, Eph 3.14-19, 1John 2.15-16, 1John 3.16-18  
August 5, 2012

What the world needs now  
Is love sweet love.  
It's the only thing that there's just too little of.  
What the world needs now  
Is love sweet love.  
No, not just for some, but for everyone.

What is it about that song that made it so popular? What is it about that song that makes you remember it? Is it how Bert Bacharach strung the words together? Is it how Dionne Warwick sung it? Or could it be true that what the world needs, today and every day, is love?

Imagine what the world would be like if everyone loved everyone else more. Since we're not perfect, we won't imagine everyone loving everyone else 100% more – we'll settle for just loving each other 50% more.

How would things be different if the terrorists in Afghanistan and Iraq loved other people 50% more? How would things be different if the people in Communist China, Africa, England, and Germany loved other people 50% more? What difference would it make if Americans loved each other 50% more – or the Michiganders or the people of Farmington Hills? What would change if the people of Prince of Peace loved each other 50% more?

I think you would be hard pressed to find anyone who wouldn't agree that if people loved each other more the world would be a kinder and gentler place. So why isn't there more love in the world? People say "I love you" all the time. Why aren't things getting better?

Too often our love is mercenary, we give our love in order to get something in return. Or our love is inconsistent, it rises and falls with our passing moods. We try to define what we mean by "I love you" but we never get it right. And when it comes to God's love – God's infinite, enduring, unconditional love – we really get things messed up because we try to relate God's perfect love to our imperfect love.

The love of God is one of the hardest things for humans to get a handle on – even Christian humans. The love of God is higher, wider, deeper, and more consistent than words can describe. There is an ocean of God's love available, but the average Christian isn't even close to tapping into it – at least, not like God wants us to tap into it. And the sad fact is that until we learn to tap into God's unlimited love, we will never be the kind of people who really make a difference in this world.

There are three facts about God's love that we need to wrap our minds around.

Everyone is looking for **love**. Whether we are Christian or not, the desire to be loved is woven into the very fabric of our psyche. I have a rather large music collection of both contemporary Christian and secular music. Being a type-A German, I have a catalog of all the song titles. In my library, I found 220 Christian songs with love in the title and 125 secular songs with love in the title.

Since the day of our birth, we have been looking for someone to feed us, to hug us, to care for us, to affirm us, to forgive us when we mess up, to accept us no matter what. It makes no difference what nationality, what race, what cultural background, what economic level – we all need love. Even stodgy old Germans need love.

Most all of our activities are aimed at preserving, enhancing, or pursuing love. The number one reason for divorce in the country is people looking for love – in all the wrong places. The evidence is clear – everyone is looking for love.

Just as there is a **universal** need for love, there is a universal **answer** for that need. If six billion people are all suffering from the same lack of love, it is going to take one enormous supply of love to meet that need. Obviously, the only one who has enough love to meet everyone's need is God. We might try to manufacture some form of love, we might try to "go it" on our own, but all those loves will fail. It is God who planted in us our need for love and only his unconditional love can fill that void.

There's a tragic **disconnection** between the universal need and the universal answer. On one hand there are six billion people with a desperate need for love. On the other hand is God with an inexhaustible supply of love. But, most often, the two hands are very far apart. The average person is not experiencing God's love.

Picture this – all six billion people on earth are brought to one place – all standing shoulder to shoulder and all the basic needs for physical existence have been met. Now picture all the oceans, lakes, rivers, and streams in the world are made up of liquid love. Love is in abundant supply and it is there for the taking but there is no connection between the need and the supply. That's the condition of the world today.

There are people in the world who have never experienced God's love because they don't know about God's love. They would embrace God's love but first they have to know it exists. Some of them may have been told about God's love but the words didn't capture their souls. They would be the people in the middle of the six billion – landlocked.

There are also people who know about God's love – have visited the ocean – but they've never quite had the nerve to go into the water. They just stand on the shore and look at the water. They know that God's loves them but they aren't sure they want to just jump into God's love. These people have never immersed themselves in God's love so they have no idea just how satisfying his love is.

The third group know about God's love, they've been to the ocean, and they even been in the water. They've washed themselves in God's love, they've drank it in, but then they climbed back out and lived like God's love made no lasting difference. They seem to think that once you've been in the water you can't go back for seconds.

They have past sins and emotional baggage so they find God's love difficult to understand and accept. They can't see how God's unconditional, sacrificial, giving love can be theirs regardless of past performance.

We've said much about God's love so it's time we get a working definition of God's love. A. W. Tozer defines God's love like this: *God's love is his holy disposition toward all that he has created that compels him to express unconditional affection and selective correction to provide the highest quality of existence, both now and forever, for the object of his love.*

Let's look at a few words in this definition. God's love is called holy. We have already seen that holy means to be in a class by itself. God's love is truly like no other. God loves you more and better than anyone else ever can or will.

We also have the word disposition. God's love is part of his disposition – his make-up – it has nothing to do with the recipient of that love. We don't earn God's love and we don't deserve God's love. God loves us because of himself not because of us. God's very nature compels him to express unconditional love and affection toward people.

We also find the words selective correction. God loves us enough to take action when we are headed in a direction that will hurt us or others. You see, God failed to read Dr. Benjamin Spock. God believes in spanking us if that's what is needed to keep us on the right track. Proverbs tells us, *"The one who spares the rod hates his child, but the one who loves his child is diligent in disciplining him"* (Prov 13:24 NET). God loves us enough to discipline us.

All this means that God wants you to be filled to the brim with life and goodness. God's love wants the absolute best for you both in this world and the next. When pleasure will move you closer to his love, he gives pleasure. When pain will move you closer to his love, he allows pain. God wants what is best for you.

Still, with all that's been said, it's hard for us to wrap our minds around God's love. Because of our human loves, we've learned that love is conditional; I'll love you if you do this; I love you because you did that; I'll love you if you're rich or popular or successful. We can't imagine a love that comes without conditions. Frankly, it's easier to ignore or doubt God's love than it is to dive into it.

To help bring God's unconditional love into focus and into your everyday life, consider the following truths.

God's every thought, desire, and plan is always for **your good** and never for **your harm**. You can trust God's intentions. When God thinks of you he only thinks of your

well being. No matter what the present looks like, God's plan is always for your welfare.

God is kind, open, approachable, and eager to be your **loving Father**. God wants to hold you and love you. God wants to be your *Abba* – your daddy. God wants to give you all of his attention. He wants you to sit and talk to him. He wants to share your life.

God **identifies** with you so much that your happiness affects his happiness. Read the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of John and see how the grief of Mary and Martha affected Jesus. Their sorrow over Lazarus' death brought sorrow to Jesus' heart. God cries when you cry. God celebrates when you are happy. God is that emotionally attached to his children.

God takes pleasure in you apart from your **performance** or **accomplishments**. God loves you simply because you are you and you are his. Do you love your children more because they do well in school or earn a large salary? Or do you love your children simply because they are your children. That's how God loves you.

God is actively orchestrating things and people in your life to provide you with the **highest good**. Remember when we talked about God being sovereign? He really is and he is sovereignly working in and around you to provide for your highest good. No matter how things look, you can trust that God knows what he is doing and he is capable of bringing his plan for you to a good end.

In order to be able to better trust in God's love we need to see it in action. So how has God shown his love to us. God has shown his love in six ways.

God has revealed his love through **Creation**. We have used Creation to see many of God's attributes, but this time I want to take a different track. Consider this, God created you because he loves you. You are a part of God's creation. God created you for the sole purpose of having an eternal relationship with him. Not only are we created by God, we are also created for God, so he can relate to us in love.

God reveals his love through his **provision**. Out of his love, God provides for everyone – good and bad alike. That can be hard for us to accept. We love it when he provides for us. We're the good guys. But we hate it when God provides for the people we don't like. But the Bible tells us that God sends the rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matt 5:45). When God provides for the unbeliever, some of them might ask, "Who is responsible for all I have?" When that question is asked, God lovingly provides us to supply to proper answer.

God reveals his love through his **discipline**. We touched on this earlier. God loves us enough to keep us on the straight and narrow. In the book of Hebrews we read, "*The Lord disciplines those he loves*" (Heb 12:6). God loves us enough to correct us. I don't know about you, but I doubt the love of a parent who ignores a misbehaving child. God will never turn a blind eye to our need for correction and discipline.

God has revealed his love though the **Incarnation**. The very fact that God left his world

of perfection to live in this world of imperfection is a supreme act of love. A holy God chose to live among unholy people so he might give us a first-hand look at what his love is all about. Feet that walked the streets of gold walked roads of dirt. The One who enjoyed the praise of unnumbered angels submitted to the insults of the crowd. The One who had no blemish touched the untouchable. All this and more so we might see his love.

God shows his love through the **Holy Spirit**. God gives us his Holy Spirit so we are never alone. Through his Spirit, God takes up residence in us. When Jesus was on the earth, he lived with his disciples. After Jesus ascended to heaven, he lived in his disciples. The Spirit of God in us gives us the assurance that all God's promises are true. The Holy Spirit is our deposit of the life to come.

And, of course, God has shown us his love through his **Son**. John 3:16 is the ultimate statement of God's love. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* There is no higher testimony to God's love for you than the sacrifice of his own Son. The price paid for something tells you how much the buyer values that thing. God paid the life of his Son for you. Does God love you?

Now that we know more about God's love we must consider how to respond to God's love.

We respond to God's love by **receiving** God's love. I'm not talking about faith – we have faith. I'm talking about receiving God's love. Many people, who call themselves Christians, insulate themselves from God's love. God's love is available for the taking, but God won't force his love on anyone. Only when we open our hearts will the love of God flow in us and through us.

We respond to God's love by **believing** God's love. Receiving God's love is a heart thing. Believing God's love is a head thing. In his first letter, John writes, *"If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And we know and rely on the love God has for us"* (1 John 4:15-16). To know the love of God is a head thing. We need both our heart and our mind to grab hold of God's love.

There are three things we can do to help us believe in God's love. First, we **saturate** our minds with the truth of God's love. The only way that will ever happen is through Bible study. You can appreciate God's Creation, you can come to church every Sunday, you can have all Christian friends, but you can only saturate your mind with God's love through Bible study.

Second, we **ask** God to help us grasp his love. Jesus said, *"Ask and it will be given to you"* (Matt 7:7). James said, *"If anyone lacks wisdom let him ask God"* (James 1:5). I can guarantee you that God will answer a prayer that asks for help receiving his love because that's good for you and God always does the best possible things for his children.

Third, we refuse to seek love in **cheap substitutes**. It's easy to look for love in the wrong places – fame, approval of others, sex, and anything else we bring into our lives in an effort to fill the void which only God's love can fill. If whatever you are using to feel loved isn't getting the job done, you're looking in the wrong place. All true love begins and ends in God.

The last way we respond to God's love is by **giving it away**. God has an unbreakable principle that the more of his love you give to others the more love he will supply to you. You can't give away so much of God's love that you run out. If everyone on earth took a full measure of God's love for themselves, there would still be more than enough left over for you to have your fill.

God's love is everywhere. It's yours for the taking. God wants you to dive into his ocean of love. He wants you to wash in it, drink it in, enjoy it, share it, and live in it.