

God Doesn't Love You ... At least not in the way you'd think.

When my young daughter cut her foot badly on some glass, I had to help hold her down while the doctor deadened the area around the cut before stitching her up. It was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. Her crying and her feeling of betrayal - "How could Daddy be inflicting this pain on me?" - was devastating to me. But it had to be done. Love demanded it.

When God sent His Son to die on the cross, it seems the opposite of love of a Father for His Son. But it had to be done. It was the only way for humanity to be saved and still maintain God's justice.

Humanity had sinned. The result of sin was death. Yet God sent his Son to take the penalty on himself.

This also meant that to receive salvation, humans would also have to die, to "pick up their cross." A seed has to fall into the ground and die before it can produce fruit. Death has to precede the gift of eternal life.

Consider this familiar verse:

John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

The phrase "so loved" doesn't mean "God loved the world SO much..." Rather, it is a Greek phrase *hoytō agapaō* that means "in this manner," referring to the cross. God "gave" his Son to be "lifted up" on the cross in death so we could receive forgiveness and mercy.

Look at the whole passage:

John 3:14-17 - "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."

The Strange Incident of the Serpents

The puzzling mention of Moses and a serpent refers to a strange story in **Numbers 21:4-9**. The Israelites were complaining about the harsh conditions in the wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt, even reviling the miraculous "manna" that God provided for them to eat. As chastisement, God sent serpents into the camp that bit and killed many of them. Then the people repented of their complaints and asked Moses to pray that God would take away the snakes.

God told Moses to create a replica of a serpent made of brass and attach it to a pole and lift it up so everyone could see it. "and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looks upon it, shall live."

Brass signifies judgment in Bible typology. The brass serpent was meant to take on or absorb the judgment God had unleashed upon the people. The curse of judgment then became attached to the brass serpent, and the people were released from it and saved.

The brass serpent is an unexpected and counter-intuitive picture of Christ on the cross. The Apostle Paul expands on this in his letter to the Galatians:

Galatians 3:13 - "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree."

The Law of God demands death for our sin and rebellion. We feel this biting pain in our guilt and shame. God's love found a way of salvation, but it meant His Son would have to die, absorbing the curse of the law on himself, while lifted up on the cross. And his subsequent resurrection shows that if we "look on him" in faith, we receive eternal life.

His Death Means Our Death

There is a condition attached to this salvation. It means that we have to leave our sinful, complaining, rebellious life behind. We die with him, but we also rise with him, transformed as a "new creation."

One familiar evangelistic tract you may have seen proclaims: "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." Our pastor used to shock us by turning that on its head: "God hates you and has a terrible plan for your life - to die."

Uh, what?

He was trying to remind us that God's love is not expressed by giving us cool stuff, or by making our life easy or making us successful "winners" with shiny happy faces or even have good kids and happy marriages. Instead He leads us to the cross, which is a path of suffering and humility. Our own personal Via Dolorosa.

God expressed His love for humankind (and also for His Son) in a peculiar way - by His Son's death on the cross, and by also requiring our death (and burial, pictured in baptism) before being raised up with Him.

God's love also includes discipline and chastening when required:

Proverbs 3:11-12 - "My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth."

God delights in his Son. If we are "in Christ," He delights in us too.

Even the destruction of Jerusalem was seen as a chastening act of God's love:

Lamentations 3:32-33 - "But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men."

Real love often has to be "tough love."

God Loves His Son

A further level of meaning is that the Father loves the Son. When we become part of His body, God looks at us and sees His Son, whom He loves. Existing outside of time, God sees us in Christ even before we believe in him. Thus we benefit from His love for His Son.

Romans 5:8 - "But God exhibits his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Using a different analogy, Paul says we have been adopted into God's family.

Romans 8:15 - "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, *Abba* ("Daddy!"), Father."

The Greek word here for "adoption" is *huiiothesia* - "placing as a son" - i.e. when we receive the "placing of the Son" in our hearts, we are placed "as a son" in God's family.

Ephesians 1:4-5 - "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption as his sons to himself through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will."

1 John 3:1 - "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knows us not, because it knew him not."

God's love, our death and the cross are all joined together in this verse:

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 (NET) - "For the love of Christ controls us, since we have concluded this, that Christ died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised."

And again here...

1 John 4:8-11 - "...God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us,

because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another."

Being Loved by God Empowers us to Love Others

Our love for one another flows from this understanding of God's love for us.

1 John 3:16 - "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

Jesus took the part of a servant when He washed the disciples' at the Last Supper, and later explained to them that true love begins in humility:

John 13:34 - "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another."

Finally, this love is not something we can psych ourselves up for or produce from our natural resolve. It's a fruit of the Holy Spirit:

Galatians 5:22-24 - "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts."

Finally, this supernatural love allows us to love our neighbors (**Matthew 22:39**), and even our enemies:

Matthew 5:44 - "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."

But... Love Not the World

- **1 John 2:15-17** - "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

The world and its value system pollutes and twists everything it touches.

Instead of seeing things of this world as something to "love," to desire and acquire or to own, we "see through" them to recognize and love the God who created it all before fallen humans messed it up.

This also frees us to love the people in the world, made in God's image, who need to

know him.

When we “see through” in that way, we can enter into the meaning of Jesus’ seemingly contradictory saying in **John 3:16** - “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

The key to doing this is to go to the cross. We can only “see through” if we are out of the way. If I haven’t gone to the cross, I will always respond as Adam and Eve did in the garden - with the lust of the eyes and the pride of life and self-seeking.