

A Lord's Day Snippet!

Biblical and Southern Studies

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SBSS

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**Twas not to make Jehovah's love
Toward his people flame,
That Jesus from the throne above,
A suffering man became.**

**Twas not the death which he endured,
Nor all the pangs he bore,
That God's eternal love procured,
For God was love before.**

**He loved the world of his elect,
With love surpassing thought;
Nor will his mercy e'er neglect
The souls so dearly bought.**

**The warm affections of his breast
Towards his children burn;
And in this love he'll ever rest,
Nor from his oath return.**

John Kent (1766-1843)

The Majesty of God's Love

"God is love."

1 John 4:8

What a declaration John makes with the guidance of the Holy Spirit! It is very sad that this attribute of God has been so misused, misconstrued, misunderstood and abused. God's attributes are an expression of the person He is comprehensively. Thus, to take one attribute to undermine another is false interpretation. To falsely proportion an attribute is to distort the holy person of God. This happens when "God is love" is made the primary attribute of God. To use this attribute like a surgeon's scalpel to excise wrath or justice or any attribute is to distort who God is. This divine love does not override the other attributes for that would pervert our understanding of the person of God. "If love is equal to God, then God is only equal to love, and God and love are identical. Thus, we destroy the concept of personality in God and deny outright all His attributes save one, and that one we substitute for God" [A. W. Tozer]. Thus, God is mischaracterized.

John did not say that love is God, but only God is love. Thus, saying “God is love” distinguishes this divine love from all other kinds of love. The love of God is His giving of Himself for the good of His eternal purpose in the Godhead and toward those loved. He gives of Himself in order to bring about His holy will. The essence of His love is described in verse 10, “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation (or the atoning sacrifice) for our sins.” Love is proof tested by action. “God’s ... love sweetens all of his attributes” [Thomas Watson]. We could say that each attribute sweetens the others. “God is love” has parallels such as “God is light” (1 John 1:5), “God is a Spirit” (John 4:24) and these express the nature of God for it would be wrong to reduce God to an abstract quality. His love is a personal action. “Seeing He is an unchangeable and eternal Being; He is an unchangeable and eternal source of love” [J. Edwards].

There is only one attribute that God ever triplicated in His Word to describe Himself and it is “Holy, Holy, Holy” not “Love, Love, Love.” Dr. R. C. Sproul responded, “It’s a shame. What God repeated most we understand least,” or appreciate least. “There are many 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. The truth is that on this, as on everything else, our thoughts need to be formed and regulated by what is revealed in Scripture. That there is urgent need for this is apparent not only from the ignorance which so generally prevails, but also from the low state of spirituality which is now so sadly evident everywhere among professing Christians. How little real love there is for God. One chief reason for this is because our hearts are so little occupied with His wondrous love for His people” [Arthur W. Pink].

How is God’s love expressed? The Bible says that God loves because He desires to do so (Deut. 7:6-7) and not because He is under some kind of obligation to do so. “We may force God to punish us, but not to love us. ‘I will love them freely’ Hos. 14:4,” [T. Watson]. God acts sovereignly as He wills. “And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay (or slap) His hand, or say unto him, What doest Thou” (Dan. 4:35)? Everything God does is for His glory, and that means what He loves as well as what He hates (Isa. 48:9-11; John 12:27-28; 17:1 cp. 13:31-32). James M. Boice in writing about the greatness of God’s love noted, “[A]lthough God’s love is indeed important and great, we cannot really understand or appreciate it in our fallen state until we know some other things about Him and about ourselves. These things must necessarily be in something like a sequence: *first*, our creation in God’s image; *second*, our sin; *third*, the revelation of the wrath of God against us because of our sin; and *fourth*, redemption. If we do not have the

sequence firmly in mind, we are unable to appreciate (let alone marvel at) God's love as we should. Instead, it might seem only reasonable that God should love us. 'After all, we are really quite lovable,' we think. However, when we see ourselves as standing in violation of the just law of God and under God's wrath, then to know that God loves us is truly remarkable. Paul makes this emphasis when he writes, 'But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us' (Rom. 5:8)."

God's love is expressed personally in the sacrifice of His Son on the cross. God can only love us through His Son Jesus Christ who must remove our sin barrier. Spurgeon illustrated, "'God is love' was the motto on the weathercock of a country friend. We have seen many curious vanes, but never one that struck our attention so much as this: 'God is love.' Our friend was asked if he meant to imply that the love of God was as fickle as the wind. 'No,' he answered; 'I mean that, whichever way the wind blows, God is love; if cold from the north, or biting from the east, still God is love, as much as when the warm south or genial west wind refreshes our fields and flocks.' Yes, so it is; our God is always love. We saw our friend the other day, when he had lost his dearly loved wife, but amidst his heartache and crushing loss he still said, 'My barn teaches me the truth I put over it in my prosperity, when the desire of my eyes was by my side—God is love.'"

Jesus said, "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love." His servant Jerry Bridges (1929-2016) remarked, "we'll be amazed at His love only to the extent we stand in awe of His person. The realization of who He is ... is what makes Christ's love so amazing."