

Understanding God's Love

Jeremy Richards

11 August 2024

Let's just. Let's pray together then. Oh, Father God, first of all, we're just so, so grateful for what you're doing in our hearts that you are still working in us, not giving up on us. Lord persistent in your pursuit of your life being developed in us. Lord, we also just thank you for your protection, Lord, over Obadiah, Lord, and for all those other people who are traveling.

Lord, we do just appreciate your care for people. Oh Lord, thank you for Marie, Lord, and the continued health and the strength to make it through this procedure in her life. Lord, we also just lift up this time to look at your word, give us understanding in it that would benefit us in our walk. In Jesus name, amen. Okay, well, we're just going to go straight to second corinthians then.

Second Corinthians, and we're at the very last verse in two corinthians. And it is the final benediction where Paul is asking God's blessing on the individuals who are from Corinth. And I think, I guess from my own perspective, I like to say to most people I meet or to have some kind of contact with, I say, God bless you. And when someone says that back to me, I appreciate it. I'm thankful for an individual's care and concern that God's blessing would be upon me in whatever area of life there is.

It's a good thing. But I also see that there is a tendency to see God's blessing from a natural perspective that may be different from God's purpose or desire to bless us. And so, as we look at Paul's blessing here in verse 14 of chapter 13 of two corinthians, I believe that gives us just a refreshing glance at what God's blessing really is. Though we appreciate all the material or natural blessings that you and I get to experience, I

ShepherdsStream.com

believe the Christian gets to walk in some of those or magnify those physical blessings in a lot of ways because of walking with God. But there are spiritual blessings that are God's primary desire to pour upon his people, that if it meant us going naked or hungry or sick, his goal would still be to pass on a spiritual blessing.

If he had a choice, if it were one or the other over natural, over spiritual, he would choose the spiritual for your and I's life. And you and I would respond to that spiritual blessing to a degree that would benefit us more than having the natural things poured upon our lives. That spiritual work accomplishes a greater work in us than all the physical things he could do for us. So let's look at that. In two corinthians, chapter 13, verse 14, it says, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen. So we looked at the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ last week. That work which he does in arresting you and I in our headlong pursuit of physical pleasure in the path that ultimately leads to hell. I was at the gun range. Now, I don't go to the gun range very much, but I have a couple times.

And there was a friend of mine there who was shooting a bear gun. And this gun, he only would shoot it three times when he'd go to the range. And because it would heat up so much when it was shot. And the shell on the gun was huge, I was shooting a 300 six. And it was my goal at that point, resting, getting everything perfect, trying to hit a target 300 yards off.

Well, he was shooting at a target like 50 yards off. And the shell on the gun was like three or four times as big as my shell. And I was like, why are you shooting so close? You know? But the bullet in his gun was like a 22 bullet.

It was very, very small. Where mine, the 36, was fairly large. And I couldn't quite comprehend. It's like, what you gonna do to a bear with a little teeny bullet going 1000 miles an hour, isn't it? Just make a little teeny hole in the bear and he's just gonna come and get you.

But the idea is that the faster the bullet is traveling, the harder the surface becomes that it hits. So a very small bullet traveling very fast makes a big impression on the bear and stops the bear because of the speed of the bullet. Other people, a huge handgun, it's the bullets that huge and the speed slow. But this gun was a very fast bullet, and that had the capability of stopping a bear in its tracks. This little bullet packed by tremendous amount of speed.

Well, you and I also need to be arrested. You and I are traveling down a path away from God, ignorant of his law and his desires for us. And the grace of Jesus Christ arrests us. It stops us, it causes us to consider the love of God. And so now that we have been, I pray, arrested by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we become aware, stopped for the moment, to consider the love of God for us.

And as we look at the love of God today, and I believe this is the aspect of that's typified by the Father. The first one, the first part of the Trinity is Jesus Christ displaying his grace. The second one here is the father displaying his love, all working together and at the same time. Yet from Urania's perspective, we can kind of separate them, even though it is a unified action of one God working in us and towards us. But in our culture, love is something that is worked for those individuals who have the most to offer are normally the ones that are the most loved.

It is a performance based love. The more you have to offer society, the more benefits that you bring, the more talents that you have, the more you are respected and possibly loved by the people around you. But what happens is we tend to make a transfer from a carnal, performance based love and take the same idea and transfer it to a spiritual and holy God. As I started looking at love this week, I started thinking about it, and do you know what happened? I went to work.

And at work, I had made a mistake and had offered a fix for that mistake. But the individuals who followed me chose to use deceit to cover up my mistake and to pass an inspection as like, oh, I started to feel a bit down, and I'm supposed to be concentrating on the love of God, but my performance is making me feel unloving, not worthy of love. And then mistakes just continue to compound, or I see my anger, or I

see stuff developing, and all of a sudden I am just shrinking. I feel the love of God just evaporating like the marine layer under a hot sun. It seems like his love is just passing away.

And what I come to identify is I see God's love as performance based also. That the better I do or the more holy I live or the more righteous I can walk, the more I feel I deserve his love. And I think if you're honest with yourself, it may be something that you struggle with also. But is God's love performance based here? Paul is desirous of that.

The love of God be with you. In order for us to appreciate and experience the love of God, we have to be able to see it from a spiritual perspective. The more we're confused or intermingle the expression of God's love with our natural ability and our desire for love, the further or the more complicated or the more distant God's love is going to be for us. Okay, so it is my desire or my hope today would be to give an expression of what God's love actually is. Okay, so we're going to go to Ephesians to try to start that.

So in Ephesians, chapter two, verse one through seven, in order to understand God's love. We need to know a couple things. How far he has to or is willing to extend his love towards us, number one. And then how is he willing to express that love to us? Right.

My friend, I think I kind of make a joke with Stacy that I kind of only really have one friend, and his name is Herb. Right. And Herb lives in capelas crossing and buys hay for me, and I go there and we talk. But he has either adopted or fostered children for his whole life. And I believe it's some 60 some children that he has fostered over the course of his life.

And his house is always full of little kids. And Herb hangs out in the shop all the time. The kids hang out in the house and Herb hangs out in the shop. So it's his wife, I think, that does the majority of the work with the children. But there was a child a couple times ago that I was there, and this child is up north, from up north of Seattle.

Right. And it is in the foster system. And the people watching that child wanted to go on a vacation. They wanted to leave the Washington state, and they couldn't take this child with them. So they started asking all the other foster families in their area, can you take this child for a couple weeks?

No, no, no. Then they went outside of their county. No, no, no. And finally they got to Grays harbor. No, no, no.

We won't take the child. No. Until they got to Herb. And Herb says, you know, we're at our limit already. We already reached our max occupancy.

We got so many little kids, and they're like, please, just take the child. No one else will. And so they made an exception. And Herb took this child. The child is severely damaged.

It will never eat. It can't walk. It has a feeding tube all the time, and it just lays there. It can't offer anything back. It just lays there with a thing in its side.

You have to change its diaper. You have to monitor it continually. And Herb made a decision to care for that child. You see, how far a person is willing to go to love is an important aspect of the love that they're willing to offer. If I told you that I was, you know, decide, you know, and I was lived a while ago, I was going to adopt a child, and I said, you know, I watched a movie the other day, and it was, Shirley Temple was in that movie, and I made the decision, I would like to adopt Shirley Temple into my family.

So I wrote her a letter. Shirley, you know, I live in Capelas beach. You know, it used to be the clam capital of the world. You know, I live in the lowest house in Grays harbor, you know, below sea level at a lot of times. And we have all these other kids.

We work a lot in the garden. You know, it's not really a fun life, but I want to adopt you in the house. And by the way, would you bring all your money in hundred dollar bills? I would like to adopt you. Right.

You know, you might say there's a difference in my love for Shirley Temple versus Herb's love toward this child. You see, an important indication of God's love is how far he has to reach in order to love. Some of us don't like to see the physical depravity that exists in Urania's heart. Some of us reject the opportunities God gives us to show us just who we really are, but is actually an important part of God demonstrating his love. He is not an individual that is performance based, that is trying to hammer you because of who you are.

No, he's trying to get you to recognize the depth of his love, the greatness of his love, because of the extended reach he has to make in order to grab you. So let's start in Ephesians, chapter two, it says, and you he made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sin, verse two, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit, who now works in the sons of disobedience. There was, in our case, us being described here as individuals who were dead. My sons went out and raided a game cam this week, right? And unfortunately, it was in the site of the house who actually had put the game cam out there.

But they had used bait of a dead fish right in front of the gamecam in hopes to draw some sort of thing. And they had taken that rope and were playing with it and such. And this rope, the owner, after we kind of had this meeting, wanted the rope back, and so they went and got it. And the owner's like, you know, I don't even want to touch the rope. Just take it and just throw it in the garbage.

Right? It had been around a dead fish. And you may have seen a similar situation. If you come across a dead animal, it may have been living just a little bit ago, but it is dead. And there's some type of revulsion that happens almost immediately when an animal dies that you're kind of just like, ah, I don't really like to touch it.

Well, here we see a similar idea. You and I have become in a similar way repulsive to God's presence. That sounds kind of rotten and rude. But the truth is, sin is much more vile to him than dead things is to you and I. The uckiness of taking a rotten animal.

I remember a few years ago there was someone threw a dead pig on the side of the road just around the corner, right? And I was like, you know, that's just gonna sit there. And so I recruited my kids. I was like, it had been stinky for a while. I was like, who else is gonna deal with it?

And so here they go. They pushed the wheelbarrow down around the corner and we had to load up this dead pig into the wheelbarrow. I don't remember what we did with it, but it was. It was repulsive, right? Your and I sin is repulsive to the nature of God.

It is absolutely contrary. One of the reasons is contrary. It says that we once walked in these sins. And these sins were being directed according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit, who now works in the sons of disobedience. Part of the reason our sins are so repulsive to God is they are being directed by the enemy of our souls.

We are being pushed along a course of path by the individual who has made himself an enemy of God. You and I in our course of path are being driven along under the influence of that strong one, the prince of the power of the air, who works in the sons of disobedience. In verse three, we see it continue. It says, among whom we also conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh and of the mind. And were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

These individuals, you and I, a part of them, were being pushed along and were willing to engage in activities that were against or are against God's law because of the lusts of our flesh. A carnal nature that is bent on using a breaking of God's law as a means of satisfying our own carnal nature. It says as a result of that kind of activity, it says we were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. An indication that instead of God being able to pour his love on us because of our activities, there was for our future only a separation from God's goodness in hell. And so we think this is not a good situation.

This is uncomfortable to talk about. I like to see myself in a positive light, and you might. But the reason is not to describe you or to make you feel a certain way. The goal of recognizing a true spiritual discernment of our own nature is to recognize just

how far God has to reach, just how much he has to overcome in order to show his love to us. It says in verse four, but God, who is rich in mercy because of his great love with which he loved us.

If we take a biblical perspective regarding our own nature, we can only come to the conclusion that God, because of a sovereign act of his will, has chosen to love you and I, regardless of our nature, in spite of the accuracy of our carnal nature, being described as one who is one nature driven by ungodline lusts, despite the fact that we are motivated to participate in acts of warfare by the influence of the devil against God, despite the fact that we were dead, dead in our sins and repulsive to him by nature, God as a sovereign act of his will. Everyone, can we catch that? Can we gather if we focus for a minute to try to separate our upbringing that is focused on a person being loved because of their performance. A change of mind to the idea that God does not love based on performance. He loves because of an inherent trait of his character.

And it says, because of his mercy, because of the richness of his goodness, because of an outpouring of his own nature. It says, but God, who is rich in mercy because of his great love with which he loved us even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, by grace, you have been saved. So we can absolutely say that in the midst of the clearest picture of our defiled nature, God loved you and I. He loved us. If that is true, then that love, and it's true that God never changes.

It also means that no matter how much or how ugly we perceive ourselves to be, his love stays consistently based on the same idea that he loved us. Initially, everyone tracking with that, I think if you would follow me around, you would just say, Jeremy, you don't deserve God's love.

I'd say I'm beginning to see it. I'm so sorry, but I never deserve God's love. There was never anything that made me deserve God's love. God approached me as a sinner, as a self righteous young man who had nothing to offer him from the very beginning. There was never anything that I did that made me love worthy.

And so why would it change? Why would I change now? Why would I change the gospel into something different now that I followed him? Amen. I think you and I sometimes return to a system where we change the doctrine of God's love and make it performance based.

We change it when we are exposed to our human nature. And instead of recognizing as an opportunity to gauge the love of God and appreciate the love of God, Jocelyn has been staying with us. And I told her at the beginning, I was like, you know, I know how to do trigonometry, and I do know how to do the very basic trigonometry, but she's not doing very basic trigonometry. And I've been very embarrassed saying that I think I knew trigonometry. And she comes asking me these questions, and she's like, Jeremy, can you help me with this?

I'm just like, oh, no, what did I do? But I got a question, right? She showed me a problem, and she didn't know the answer. And I looked at it, and I saw the mistake she made, and she wanted to know. The teacher wanted to know the absolute value between two points, right?

And that was an express that the answer that they were looking for was the distance between one absolute value positive and the other negative. That is somehow how you and I learn to appreciate the love of God. The lowness of our state of being causes the highness of God's love to come into a complete perspective. But when you and I reject the opportunity to see the reality of our nature, the corruption of our lust, we deprive ourselves of the opportunity to see the great love of God. Instead of that opportunity to being enveloped in our being, what we do is we shun the ability.

We shade it by distancing ourselves and saying we're not worthy of it. I'm not asking for anyone to start feeling guilty about themselves. But when God does give us the opportunity to recognize it as an opportunity to see the distance in which God had to come to rescue you and I. But it also says another thing we have to look at when we look at the love of God is how much a person is willing to pay for the individuals that they love, right? I think there's a lot of individuals.

And I, as a man, I unfortunately have to. To point back to us, and we see a woman, and we tell her just how much we love her, right? Oh, we love her so much. But really, our love sometimes is a selfish love. Right?

I imagine there's a lot of people that probably thought they loved Marilyn Monroe. Now I'm bringing up these old people I really don't know anything about. But in reality, their love was probably a selfish love that was more desiring to get something than give. A person's love is not typified by whether they say they love, but actually how much they're willing to give in order to show their love, right? And here we see that not only did God reach down very deep to rescue us, not only was the extent of his love made manifest.

Bye. The condition we were in, but the amount he was willing to pay for us also proves his love, right? It says, for God so loved the world that he was willing to give something that is valuable to him. I always make a joke about my soliloquy or something. I can't remember that word of, you know, how much I love Stacy.

You know, I would do this and that, and I'm, you know, waxing poetic and stuff. And Stacy's like, hey, just a minute. Would you take out the trash? And I'm like, stacy, quit interrupting me. I'm trying to tell you something.

I would go over. I would do some. I would fight armies. She's like, jeremy, I just want you to take out the trash. And I'm like, stacy, stop that.

Right, right. God is willing to show his love, right? For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. That thing, that communion that he had, the most valuable thing that he possessed and would not want to separate from. He was willing to give in a price for the redemption of you and I.

He was willing to give. Well, if we looked at the nature of love, there is also one of the things that we need to look at is the expression of love. If we can look at God's nature of love and come to a conclusion that, you know, I would rather enjoy the biblical expression of God's love. I want it. But then we also need to look at how he does that, how he pours that love on us just really quickly.

We can't escape the fact that in heaven, God wants to pour his love out us. It is described as the wedding feast of a lamb. It is an opportunity for an omnipotent and unsearchable God to show the fullness of his character with us. It is that blessed time that you and I, as christians, should look forward to. Some people think that heaven will be boring, but we can even see naturally here on earth.

All the scientists have been gathered together since the enlightenment to try to search out or sound the depth of God's understanding. And you know what we found after a hundred years of looking? That God is way more complicated than we realized. There's way more questions now than there were 100 or 200 years ago when the enlightenment started. Right?

And I would fully believe that if all the men on the earth and all the women of the earth became scientists, and we all looked for another hundred years, and we all put our resources towards sounding out the knowledge of God's physical understanding, in 200 years, I would absolutely bet that we would have more questions than we have answers to. The depth of his greatness would be even more than we see it to be right now. Well, if that is true, and John says, if all the books contain the knowledge of Jesus Christ, it could not be recorded that heaven itself would be an expression of God's love towards his people. That would be unending for us. But we're not going to look there.

One thing we're going to look at is on earth, how do we experience God's love? You and I, by nature, are smoozers, right? We just want to be schmoozed with love. We just want someone to come and just pet us continually, right? Just someone just to make us feel good all the time.

And we think that, hey, if God loves us, that's his duty to do. But just because we want to be loved a certain way does not mean that that is how God loves, right? So let's go to John, chapter 14.

How does God love? How does God express his love to a people who need his love?

In chapter 14 of John, verse 19, written to a people like you and I, who need an expression of God's love, who desire it, it says, a little while longer and the world will

see me no more.

But you will see me because I live. You will live also. At that day you will know that I am in my father, and you, and me, and I and you. He who has my commandments and keeps them. It is he who loves me, and he who loves me will be loved by my father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.

Verse 22. Judas, not Ascariot, said to him, lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us and not to the world? Jesus answered and said to him, if anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my father will love him. And we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me does not keep my words.

And the word which you hear is not mine, but the father's who sent me. Here we see that those who love Jesus will be loved by the father. The way in which we love Jesus, by keeping his commandments. It seems like a simple idea that if we love Jesus, we keep his commandments. If we keep his commandments, we'll be loved by the Father, we'll experience the love of the Father.

I'm not saying here that this is something that sends a person to hell automatically or something like that. No, this is the ability for a believer, for someone who does abide in Christ, to actually experience the love of God. There are actions that you and I make that shield us from the love of God. Everyone make sense. There are things that you and I do that do not enable us to partake of the love of God.

There are other things that bring us into the fullness of the love of God. If you and I are aware of that. If there's a desire in you and I to experience the love of God while on earth, though I pray your desires to experience it in heaven, there is a way in which we do it. And we're going to go to chapter 15, verse nine, and it picks up the same idea. It says, as the father loved me, I also have loved you.

Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may remain in you and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one

than this than to lay down one's life for his friends.

You are my friends if you do whatever I command you. Here we see an opportunity to engage in the love of God. That opportunity is given by an invitation to express the love of God in our own lives towards a people like us who didn't deserve it. If you are not feeling the love of God and focus more on what you've done wrong, I would say it's time to shift directions. God showed his love for us by showing his love to a people who didn't deserve it.

Anyone know that? There might, in your case, be people who don't deserve love.

That's for sure. But that's a good one for your wife to answer now, right?

I think you and I are surrounded by people and circumstances where they demonstrate they are an individual who do not deserve our love. Right? That is an opportunity for you and I to express God's love towards them. An expression of God's love in and to a people who don't deserve it, brings an interaction with God's love, a sharing of God's love, a participation in his care for people. If you're looking for God's love, it's time to leave a performance based religion that is based on how well we do and instead focus on the only thing, the only commandment Jesus has given us to love one another.

And it would be my encouragement to you and I. It's when others don't deserve it that is the biggest opportunity to love and also the biggest option to experience God's love towards us. And let's just go ahead and pray. O Father. Lord, we come to you.

Lord, I acknowledge that sometimes I do not view my frustration, my prejudices, my anger as an opportunity.

Lord, I am sorry for that. I also recognize that the times I have been able to love my enemies have been the most fulfilling part of my life. Lord. And I thank you for being so patient and kind with me. Lord.

And I pray just as a group of people, Lord, if I could move, if I could shove like one of those hay bales we make and I push and I lean and I throw my energy into it. I move to try to tip it over its vertex to get it moving, Lord, if I could somehow move this

congregation, Lord, if with tears and cries, Lord, with vehement, please, Lord, to move us to consider hate people, ugly people, prejudiced and dirty people, Lord, if you could cause us to love them, to love them, Lord, this Sunday and this message and this time would be worth it. Lord, we thank you in Jesus name, amen.