

**§ 3. Doctrine of God**  
**Lecture 21**  
**Practical Application of God's Love**

Today we want to bring to a close a major section of our Defenders class – dealing with the attributes of God. We are going to look at an application of the moral attribute of God – his love. We saw in the lesson last time that God exhibits *agape* love – universal, unconditional, impartial love. Even while we were hateful enemies of Christ, God loved us and sent his Son to win us back to himself.

What application might we draw from this attribute of God's love?

1. We should *bathe in the sunshine of God's love for us*. Ephesians 3:14-19, Paul writes,

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

What an incredible description of our union with Christ. We are rooted and grounded in love. Paul asks that we might know the depths of the extent – the height – of Christ's love for us, love which he says even surpasses knowledge. For all the knowledge that we might acquire, the love of Christ surpasses that. That is the love that we have as we are in Christ. We need to revel in that. We need to bathe in that love that God has shown toward us.

There is no fear in this sort of love as we read in 1 John 4:18. It says, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love.” Remember we saw that the holiness or the justice of God is equally essential to God as his love and his grace. Fear of God springs out of that terrible holiness and justice. But for the one who is perfected in love he need not fear God anymore because in Christ we are his beloved and all of God's love is showered upon us.

Paul says that there is no separation from God's love that he has exhibited toward us in Christ. Romans 8:35-39 says:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written,

“For thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So insofar as we are in Christ we are invulnerable to these perils and attacks upon us.<sup>1</sup> Nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ. The only person who can separate you from the love of Christ is yourself if you separate yourself from him by rejecting his love. Jude 21 tells us, "Keep yourselves in the love of God." What an interesting exhortation from Jude – keep yourself in the love of God.

In the book of Revelation, chapter 2, we are reminded that we need to review ourselves (assess ourselves) to see if we are holding to our first love, or if we have begun to cool in our love and commitment to Christ. In Revelation 2:4-5 the angel says to the church in Ephesus:

But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first.

We need to review our lives to see if we are holding to our first love, or if our ardor has begun to wane as we have grown older in Christ. Then return to that first love and keep ourselves in the love of God as Jude tells us to do.

So we need to bathe and revel in the sunlight of God's love for us.

2. *God's love then becomes the basis for our self-love.* God's love of us is the basis for our love of ourselves. You'll remember we saw in our discussion of divine omniscience that God knows everything about you. There is no skeleton in the closet, no hidden sin, no secret fault that he does not already know. Yet he loves you unfailingly and unconditionally. God loves us despite everything that is wrong with us. That provides the basis for self-love. If God loves you that much then why can't you accept yourself? On the basis of God's love for you – if you believe what God says – then you can accept yourself and these feelings of inferiority and failure and guilt ought to be driven out because if God loves you that much you should be able to accept yourself as well and fight against those emotional vestiges perhaps of an unhappy childhood or a dysfunctional home or other influences that have left it difficult for you to accept yourself and to love yourself in the way God wants you to. That is the second point – a deep realization of God's love for us can be the basis for our own self-love and self-acceptance in a healthy way.

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<sup>1</sup> 5:10

3. Finally, *God's love is the basis for our love of others in turn.* 1 John 4:19-21 makes this point. John says,

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also.

On the basis of God's love filling our lives, this should then be extended toward others. We need to forgive others who have wronged us and to love them with the love that God gives to us.

Matthew 5:43-48 – the Sermon on the Mount – talks about the kind of love that Christ calls upon us to exhibit.<sup>2</sup> Jesus says,

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Just as God loved us while we were yet enemies, so here Jesus says you shall love your enemies. Love those who hate you and persecute you and use you – we are to love them. Notice that he says if you only love those who love you you are no better than these execrable Roman collaborators – the tax collectors – who were regarded as traitors by the Jews. Or you are just like a Gentile whom the Jews thought of as dogs. Jesus is saying that you've got to have more love than the kind of love that even these people exhibit. Your love needs to be love like the heavenly Father. It is on the basis of the realization that God's love was directed to us while we were yet hateful and enemies and rebels against him that we can ask him to give us that love for those who oppose us and hate us as well.

It has been said that love is measured by service and service is measured by sacrifice. Look at God's example. Look at the depths to which he was willing to go for our sake in becoming incarnate as a man, taking on the limitations of human existence, and then becoming a sacrifice for sin, bearing incomprehensible pain undeserved innocent suffering, simply for our sake because he loves us so much. Christ's example is the example of this self-giving sacrificial love. So we need to look for opportunities, I think, again to be intentional about this. Andrea and Eric are going through this terrible surgery

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<sup>2</sup> 9:58

and are going to be needing service. They are going to be needing help during her recovery. Will we step up to the plate and sign up on this list that Stephanie is putting together or will we be apathetic and indifferent and say we will let others do it? This requires intentionality and effort. But, as I say, the depth of one's service and the sacrifice you are willing to make is going to be a measure of the love that you are to exhibit toward others, especially to the brethren.

Those are some thoughts about an application of God's love in our lives.

## **START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* I would like to make a comment or a testimony-type deal. At work, like you said, going out and trying to find somebody to minister to, I remember my brother challenged me to it saying, *You need to find somebody to go ahead and evangelize to.* I've never done that. I kind of just prayed before asking for somebody to come up to me, and I would reach out to them then. He challenged me, *Why don't you just go up to Walmart, find a person who is maybe disabled in a way, and help them take their cart to the car and minister.* So I said OK. That night I prayed, but God led me to do it at work. I hardly ever went out with anybody for lunch. I just kind of went home or had my own. Now I just go out to do lunch with somebody once a week. Just last week I happened to find another person I could reach out to and have a conversation.<sup>3</sup> Hopefully I can invite this friend of mine next week to this class. That is just how it works. It is really that simple. Just go. Things work out for the best.

*Dr. Craig:* Thank you.

*Student:* The church has emphasized a lot of come-and-see ministry. Even our church. We do a lot of foreign missions, but part of the Gospel is go-and-tell, not necessarily come-and-see. It is sad that we don't have any visitation. If we have a barbecue you have 500 people. If you say you are going to knock on some doors in the neighborhood and give them a church brochure you will have about 20. This is what you have to do. It is all aspects of that. To have tools with you, evangelism bracelets, a tract, a good card that has Christian movies on it, and things you can carry with you. It is amazing how many conversations get started when you do that. You've got to have both go-and-tell and come-and-see.

*Dr. Craig:* I've never heard it put that way before, but that's nice.

*Student:* We used to say from the announcements up at the front, *If you fill out your connection card we won't knock on your door* – that is exactly what we should be doing – going and knocking on the door. Very few people resent that when you do it. That is just some input. I think intentionality is important. That is why mission trips are good. There

are a lot of people that have never gone on one. The intentionality in providing a time or situation or looking for those situations, God will reward you if you show up.

*Dr. Craig:* Amen.

*Student:* First is just a comment on God's love. Maybe it is just my experience but I have to rely on God's love through me because it seems as if it is so difficult – me and my own sin nature – to love the way he wants us to love. I find I become judgmental or critical. That is so foreign to him. I have to really focus on pushing back my sin nature so that his love will come through. If you are successful (and hopefully through prayer you can be) it is a whole different experience.

*Dr. Craig:* The Christian life cannot be lived in the power of the flesh, can it? It needs to be through the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

*Student:* I don't know that in this life we can fully constantly do that. It just takes the Holy Spirit and you have to really, I think, rely on that and to just focus on it. That's just one thing. The other thing I wanted to mention is that my daughter uses this approach in reaching others that I think is excellent. She says, *By the way, is there anything I can pray for you about?* That kind of opens the door, even if it is a non-Christian or whatever. It lets them know where you are coming from. Then sometimes they will say, *Well, as a matter of fact;* and then it just opens the door. I thought that was an excellent tool I wanted to share.

*Dr. Craig:* Yes, that is a nice opener.

*Student:* What is your take on the practical application of “love your enemies” in an ISIS world?

*Dr. Craig:* I differentiate between what you as an individual have the right to do and what the state has a right to do and the agents of the state. When an armed service member kills a person that is in ISIS, he is not acting on his own personal initiative. He is acting as an agent of the state. He is authorized by the state to conduct warfare on behalf of the state. Paul says in Romans 13 with regard to the Roman emperor, “He does not bear the sword in vain.” Rather, he is God's instrument to execute justice. We need to be sure that the wars that we engage in are just wars. But then if they are it seems to me that one is entirely morally justified in resisting the enemy with violence and trying to defeat the enemy by violent means.<sup>4</sup>

## **END DISCUSSION**

With that, let me bring our lesson to a close because I want to conclude this section of the class.

We have now surveyed some of the principal attributes of God. I hope that it has served to expand and magnify your concept of who God is. God is not only infinite, self-existent, eternal, omnipresent, and immutable, but he is also personal, omniscient, omnipotent, holy, and loving. What a God God is, the God that we worship. Before the creation of the world, when God alone existed, God knew and planned to take on human flesh and to enter human history as a man for our sake and for our salvation. And he did this because he loves us so much and would do this to win ourselves to him. The infinite God loves you that much.

I want to conclude with the words of Charles Spurgeon with which we began:

The proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy which can ever engage the attention of a child of God is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father.<sup>5</sup>