

# How Much Does God Love You?

## **The Magnitude of God's Love**

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This is actually a convergence, coming from two different sources; and I put the two different sources together into this Bible Study. It is built around I John 4:17. However, it's going to take a great deal of background information as a foundation before we actually get to I John 4:17. My part of the convergence of these two sources actually began in a sermon that I gave. I think it was before I began the series on The Beast, and I think that I gave this sermon back around the end of January or early February of this year.

I John 4:17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as He is, so are we in this world.

My comment on that verse, when I was giving my sermon, was that I felt there was something really astounding, really great, and awesome in that verse; but I still didn't quite grasp what it was. So I just left it the way it was.

Well, it was a week or two later that I got an email; and in that email was a Bible study. It was a Bible study that was put together by Pat Higgins, who lives down there just outside the Orlando area. It just so happened that he had included that verse as part of a study that he was making, and he felt that he could give me some help in understanding what that verse meant.

Indeed, it was a very nicely written Bible study. He wasn't trying to beat me over the head with some new truth or anything. It was very appealingly written. So this Bible Study then is the result of the convergence of his study and my study put together.

My study actually came out in that sermon that was on the titles that God calls us. I only went through about twelve or thirteen of those titles (even though there are quite a number more). The whole purpose of what I was trying to attempt was to encourage us to understand what an awesome position we are in, in relation to God. That is, what He has made available to us. And it is even more astounding when we begin to realize that He says that He has calls the weak of the world. Yet He has given all of these gifts that are represented by the titles that He has given to us. Each one of those titles is not only a gift to us, but it is also a responsibility as well.

My sermon was built around I Peter 2:9-10, which says:

I Peter 2:9-10 You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light: which in time past were not a people [Here we are—nobody.], but are now [we are] the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

My sermon was really built around that word "peculiar," which some Bibles translate into special. Their translation shows that God is not thinking of anything that is odd or strange or queer but rather that we are special. We are unique. We are different. But we are not odd—which is the way that we tend to look at the word, or use the word, "peculiar." And so we are faced with the undeniable fact, from God's own Word, that we are a unique group of people—special to God, distinctive from all others who are not in that group.

And so the titles, that I showed you that God gives, you will recognize right away. We are the called. We are the chosen. We are the redeemed. We are saints, virgins, the Bride of Christ, sons of God, citizens of the Kingdom of God, the Israel of God, heirs of the promises, the body of Jesus Christ. We are the branches, the church, and the firstfruits. We are a treasure to God, and we are the beloved of God.

Unfortunately, that specialness gets lost much of the time; and it becomes neglected. Our focus tends to be on our day-to-day concerns, and that is very natural. Life is not all that easy for us. Jesus described that we are to follow the straight and the narrow—with "straight" meaning difficult. So Christianity is not intended to be easy. But Christianity itself, and the requirements of Christianity, can be distracting—away from things that can be very, very encouraging.

It is in the carrying out of the responsibilities that these titles are revealing to us that we tend to lose sight of our specialness. That's a shame—because if we allow it, if we will believe it, it can be very, very encouraging and can be a force in motivating us to carry out those responsibilities simply because it is so encouraging.

It was the trials that Pat Higgins was going through that, at least partly, lead to his looking into the Bible for answers. And what clicked to him resulted in the Bible study. And so, whenever we put together his insight into what he was going through, and why he was going through it, and the way that he was to look at what he was going through—with my sermon on our specialness before God—this Bible Study resulted.

For the most part here, in a way I'm going to be drawing more from what Pat Higgins turned up (especially in one portion of his Bible study) than I am from my own sermon that I incorporated into this Bible Study because this, to me, opened up the door to understanding I John 4:17 much more clearly than I'd ever understood it before. And what Pat turned up is, to me, (I don't know how else to say it)—it is AWESOME. I mean it is almost mind-boggling what God says about His love for us.

We are going to go to John 17, which contains Jesus' prayer—made just prior to His crucifixion, just prior to His being taken. We are going to begin in verse 20, where He says:

John 17: 20-23 "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; that they all may be one; as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that You have sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are

one: I in them, and You in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them, as You have loved Me."

Jesus' prayer at this point has reached the place where He has deviated somewhat from the beginning portions of the prayer, in that He is now praying for US. He is still including the apostles, who were standing before Him, within His request; but it is directly aimed as us because we fit what verse 20 says—"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word."

Remember that this was before the New Testament was written, and the men who were before Him (with the exception of the apostle Paul) were going to be the ones that wrote the New Testament. And so we have come to believe on Jesus more because of what those men wrote than what the Old Testament says. The New Testament gives sense to what was written in the Old Testament. Also it directly connects us to the life of Jesus—why He lived, and why He died—and where we fit into the picture. The Old Testament contains all kinds of examples that will give us more specific instruction in many, many things.

Before we consider the requests that Jesus made (There were three of them actually, at least.), I want to take us back in time and examine at least one aspect of the relationship between the Father and the Son—because it is within this relationship that we find out how much God loves us.

I don't know how long it took them to plan out this creation; but I do know that there was a tremendous amount of thought that went into what they did, because, when they created everything, everything was in perfect balance (up until the time that Adam and Eve were created). And what they created is AWESOME in its display of power.

We have seen those films that give us some kind of a little insight into the awesome size of the universe and all of those heavenly bodies out there that speak of how big the mind of God is—how He thinks. He thinks in terms that are so immense that they are beyond our capabilities. We can look at ourselves. Evelyn told me that she read, I think, that the human body has 80,000 enzymes systems in it. 80,000—just in the human body! And that's just one tiny portion of the creation of God.

Think of all the variety that is there, and all the thought that had to go in to make sure that everything was balanced and in harmony with producing life at its very best. And that's just one tiny, tiny portion of what God created. And you think of all the tremendous variety (of animals, of birds, of sea life) and the complexity and yet simplicity of things like water, (How "life giving" it is. We can't live without it!), and air, and sunshine. Everywhere you look, we are astounded if we will allow it—to begin to realize what a tiny portion of the mind of God we actually understand.

Well, these two had to work in harmony in order for this to be produced. What if all along the way they were fighting with one another? "My idea is better than yours, and I'm not going to do anything until you give in on this point." Neither one of them was trying to control the other.

And I think that there was, without a doubt, discussion between the two of them as to what they should do about this, how they should harmonize this and that. And all the tremendous variety undoubtedly came out of the minds of both of them. "Why don't We do this?" "Why don't We do that?" There were suggestions flying back and forth as they planned all of this. But never, ever—not one time—did they ever fight over anything. Always, regardless of the circumstance, the Son (like Ephesians 5 says) would submit to the Father. Or the Father would submit to the Son, because He saw the loving wisdom in what was being suggested to Him ought to be part of this creation in which they were putting together all of the pieces that would finally end up in God reproducing Himself through Adam and Eve and all of their progeny.

I've used this illustration—Evelyn and I have been married for fifty-one years. That isn't even the blink of an eye compared to the time God the Father and God the Son have been working together. Our relationship hasn't been harmonious like theirs, but we get along very well. I think so well that there are times when it almost seems like we are Siamese twins. We are "joined at the hip" with one another.

I can tell you, though, that (from her background, and her experience, and her gender, and things like that) she does not see things in exactly the same way I do. I see things differently than she does. She is more aggressive in some areas than I am, and I am more aggressive in other areas than she is. And yet she is more conservative in some areas than I am, and I am more conservative in some areas than she is.

I really appreciate her insight into spiritual things. And virtually everything that I prepare (sermonette, sermon, Bible Study), I consult with her on that. The consulting is always informal. I don't hand her a sheet and say, "This is what I am thinking of." But rather it's talking. We talk with one another. I'll say, "I'm thinking about this right now. What do you think of that?" And on and on, and back and forth, until virtually everything I give to you in the way of a sermon or sermonette has been filtered through her thinking. Then, what I want to use in a sermon, I use it. To me, it's a good illustration that helps me to understand the way the Father and the Son work together.

Evelyn will tell you that I don't always agree exactly with her, and she doesn't always agree exactly with me; and so we submit to one another (if we are humble enough to recognize that the other is thinking better at this particular time, and on this particular subject). But it sort of gives an idea of what the Father and the Son were going through.

We are going to go back to verse 23 once again. How deep and how intimate their relationship was, we can only guess at. We can only suppose, or think about. We are not going to get a precise answer on it. But we do know that they followed what it says there in Ephesians 5, and they submitted to one another out of respect for one another. And so there was never any warfare. There was no disturbance in their harmony because they have lived that way FOREVER.

John 17: 23 "I in them, and You in Me, that they may be made perfect in one..."

There's a request right there. "Perfect" does not mean without flaw, but that they may be

made complete in one. And ultimately that "one" becomes the one Family—the Family of God.

John 17: 23 "...and that the world may know that You have sent Me."

This is a request that is asking for fruit in our lives, in order that we might witness to the world that Jesus indeed is the Christ, that He is our Savior, and that Jesus was sent from God for our salvation and for our perfection. As our High Priest, that's His job—our perfection.

John 17: 23 "and have loved them, as You have loved Me."

It's this third request that we are going to spend the time on. Christ is asking, in our behalf, that God would make it possible for us to understand—to know, and to know that we know—that we are loved every bit as much as God loves Christ. Let that sink in.

He loves us every bit as much as He loves this One that He has spent eternity with! That's hard for us to fathom, but we will give evidence of this from other places in the Scriptures.

The word "as" is key to this understanding. My American Heritage College Dictionary says that "as" means, "to the same degree, to the same extent, to the same quantity, of the same quality, in the same manner." In short, the word "as" means no more, no less, equal. No more, no less, equal.

When that understanding is put back into that verse, it means that it is true to say that there is not a single disciple (one in whom is God's Spirit, that has made them a son even as Jesus was a Son) that God loves any more, or less, than Jesus. That's not Ritenbaugh's interpretation. That's what Jesus said.

I don't doubt that there are many times in your life that you could not even begin to think that was true, depending upon what you were going through. When you were hurting—either because of something that you did, or that somebody else did, or that you feel was done to you (whether by friend, neighbor, or God Himself). "How can God love me when He does this to me, or allows this to happen to me?"

But we are running afoul of the Scriptures if we don't believe what Jesus said. You know very well that every prayer that Jesus asked God answered. And the reason God answered it is because every request that Jesus made was in harmony with the Father's will. And those are the prayers that will ALWAYS be answered! Any request we ever make to the Father that is in harmony with His will, He will answer it. We can bank on that.

So I tell you no lie, on the basis of the authority of Jesus Christ, that the Father loves you as much as He ever loved Jesus Christ. YOU are a part of His Creation, and He loves what He made and what He is making. He's looking forward to that time when WE share life with Him on the same level. He's made the promise to us that He will bring us into His Kingdom.

I warn you that, in order to get us to that place, it may be painful. It may be scary. But it has to be that way. He would not put us through that if He didn't love us. If He didn't love us, He

would do the way many parents do and just ignore their kids. But God won't do that. And, in order to make us into what He wants us to be—if we are stubborn and resistant—it is going to be painful, to get us corrected (or to see what He wants us to do).

John 5:19 Then answered Jesus and said unto them, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do: for what things soever He does [that is, what the Father does], these also does the Son likewise."

What that principle means to you and me in practical application is that Christ loves us to the same incredible degree as the Father does—because He copies, He imitates. He has the same capabilities. Less authority; but the same capabilities, the same nature, the same mind, the same goals in mind—everything like the Father. He loves us to the same incredible degree that the Father does!

He is not jealous of us being added to the Family. He is in no way in competition with us. He follows the Father in all things. And the Father, as a perfect Parent, does not love one child more than others. God judges without respect of persons. There is no favoritism with God (like there was with Jacob and his favoritism with Joseph).

The American Standard Version translates that last clause, there in verse 20, as "just as." (Think of the definitions of the word *as*.) They translate it "just as You have loved Me." The Common English Version translate that "as much as You have loved Me." And the Weymouth Version combines the other two and says "Just as much as You have loved Me."

You might be able to get, from my excitement for the subject, why Pat Higgins' Bible study just turned me upside-down mentally. Wow! What a revelation this is. How long have I been reading the Bible, and I overlooked that—that little two-letter word, "as." It seems so insignificant; but what an impact there is in terms of being at both one and the same time humbled (Why does He love us so much?) and then, on the other hand, encouraged that such an incredible thing can be true. He will never, ever, hold anything back from us that is needful for Him to make us into what He is.

Luke 18 contains a parable that we look at quite frequently. We use it quite frequently because of verse 8. It's verse 8 that draws our attention to what Jesus said here because it involves the time of the end. It involves the time of Christ's return. And so Christ says:

Luke 18:8 "I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, shall He find faith on the earth?"

We are quite familiar with that statement, but I think there is something that we may well overlook. It's one of those things, because the parable is so familiar to us, that we can very easily overlook a question that might need to be asked.

We all know that the just shall live by faith. Salvation is by grace, through faith. And so faith is

important to overcoming, growing. It is important to enduring. And it is important to salvation itself, and showing love to one another that we have the kind of faith that Jesus is speaking of here.

This is something that is aimed directly at you and me, in the end time. So we need to ask ourselves the question (which I think we do frequently), "Are we living by faith?" But, in asking that question, it may very well be that we are missing very much of what Jesus is asking. That is because our mind tends to focus faith in terms of believing that God exists.

Do we believe that God exists? We might ratchet that up a few degrees in importance by saying "Do we have faith in trusting God?" But I don't think that is really what we need to focus on. There is something that we need to have faith in that is far more important than believing that God exists.

To give you an illustration, James said that the demons believe that God exists; and they tremble. But does believing that God exists and trembling before Him have anything to do with their salvation? It doesn't motivate them to obedience to God. The same is true of their ruler—Satan. He is probably the prime example of knowing that God exists.

It says that he walked up and down amongst the stones of fire. We are talking here about the very throne of God. He was one of three (as far as we are able to see) of the greatest spirit creations that God ever put together, and he was probably the supreme one in terms of all the abilities that God created in him and all of the powers of intelligence and the possibilities of having wisdom that existed within him. But something got to him, and all of his proof that God exists did not save him from what got into him.

We know that it had its beginnings in pride that was within him. But I think that I have learned enough from this world to see reflections of the mind of Satan the Devil that I can pinpoint more specifically what got into Satan—because he keeps pumping this thing right into human beings, all the time. He knows that it will wear away at people, and they will eventually come to hate God (if they don't overcome it)—just like he hates God.

He felt victimized by God! He felt that God did not love him the way God loved others. And this led him to think that he deserved more and better than others. And it created tremendous dissatisfaction in him, which he justified by saying to himself that God didn't love him anyway.

If you find yourself thinking that you are a victim, and find yourself complaining a lot about your lot in life, about what is going on—I don't know whether or not you realize it, but that is actually an accusation against God who loves you from the very depth of His heart. And that is what Satan works at. He wants to make us feel that we aren't LOVED!

You respond to somebody who loves you. And if Satan can make you think (even getting just a little bit in there) that God doesn't love you, then you will turn on God. Trust hinges on love! We trust people who love us; and we distrust those that we think don't love us, and we make them enemies.

What Jesus is talking about in Luke 18:8 is *faith that God loves us*. That's what we have to have faith in. We are coming to a time in this world when things are going to be so scary; things are going to be so scarce (I mean, things in short supply) that we are not going to feel safe. We are

going to feel as though death is maybe just around the corner. As if it is on every side. Or, that we have the sword of Damocles hanging over our head. We are in pain because of disease, and fears because the government is persecuting (or somebody is persecuting). And we may even be running for our lives.

What do you think those people in the Coliseum in Rome felt in relation to God when lions and tigers were coming at them, or they were able to witness brothers and sisters in the faith who were turned into human torches (by having pitch, or oil, or whatever poured on them). They were set on fire, and they became torches. "Where is God?"

When Christ comes, will He find people who believe that God loves them? Every one of those people who are put to that test—which may include you and me—are going to believe that God exists. That's not an issue, any more than it was an issue in Satan leaving loyalty to God in the bushes somewhere while he went out and sought his own superior position, compromising all he had received from God before that time.

It's when things look "bad" that we have a tendency to turn away—just like the Israelites did at the Red Sea. Think of this. They had the witness day in, day out, night in, and night out because God was in the pillar of fire, and He was in the cloud by day. So He was "the God who was there." But when they saw the enemy approach with all of their chariots, they suddenly forgot all about the love of God that released them from their prison in Egypt and gave them liberty, and a chance for life.

Even Moses was taken aback a bit, so that God had to say, "Come on, Moses. Do something!" Then he caught himself, and struck the water with his staff; and it parted. Then they had a way of escape.

All you have to do is follow the Israelites through the wilderness, and you will find this same pattern repeated over and over again. When things looked "bad," they forgot all about the God who loved them and who was supplying them—every day—with manna to eat, and water out of the rocks. He was providing for them, but they didn't believe that God loved them. They believed that He existed. They didn't believe that He loved them.

They reasoned, "If He loved us, He wouldn't treat us like this." But my Bible shows me in Deuteronomy 8, where God reports to you and me (so that we won't repeat the same mistake), "I [God] purposely made them go hungry." He caused things to occur to them so that they would have the opportunity to turn their back on Him. Thus, He learned whether they were really going to be loyal.

The same pattern is going to be repeated. This is why Jesus was so concerned. "When the Son of man comes, will He find faith on earth?" Will He find people who believe that God loves them?

Luke 18:1 He spoke a parable unto them to this end [This was the purpose.], that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.

"Not give up." Remember that! God is going to test us, and it is going to look bad. Do we have faith—that God is really there, that He is aware, and that we trust His love for us? Jesus is

warning us that, when these circumstances occur, we are always to *pray* and *not give up*. God is going to push us—in order to produce in us the qualities, the characteristics, and the mind that is like His and will always, always TRUST HIM under every circumstance.

Israel never lived up to this, because they didn't trust Him. And they didn't trust Him because they really didn't believe that He loved them. Their own conceptions of God came out of Egypt, and the conceptions that they carried with them were not the truth about the true God. And they kept reverting in their thinking to what they had learned in the world about God. But God is not like the gods of this world. He is ONE.

This becomes exceedingly important to us as we move closer and closer to the end. In Matthew 24 (which we all understand is Jesus' prophecy about the end and the conditions that are going to be extant at that time), when talking about the church and the cultures and the conditions that the church is living in, He says:

Matthew 24:12 "And because iniquity [lawlessness] shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold."

It's that very statement that makes us understand that He is speaking about the church. First of all, the whole chapter is addressed to the disciples. It was their question that triggered how Jesus responded. By the time we get to verse 12, love comes into the picture because the kind of love that Jesus is talking about is that love that can come only from God. It is the love of God that is shed abroad in our hearts.

In this verse, we see that love can grow cold! And one of the things that makes it grow cold is iniquity. I know that you are feeling the affects of this, as we become more and more aware of what is going on in the world. Everywhere we look there is iniquity, lawlessness, sin. It is visible in business. It is visible in entertainment. It is visible down the street at the supermarket. It is everywhere! And it exerts a pressure. It wears away at our feelings about life itself.

I hear it, and I say it myself: We can't wait until this is over. Why can't we wait? Because it's so wearying; and we are getting tired fighting it. That's Jesus' concern here. There seems to be an endless supply of that pressure on us always, to do what? To join in with what everybody else is doing—to go along with it. Because iniquity abounds, love grows cold. We quit fighting it (iniquity) in our own life; and we begin to compromise and just go along with it. It's much easier that way.

It's no wonder that He said, in Luke 18:8, "When the Son of man comes, will He find faith on earth?" That is, faith in God's love. We should have that love in us, but it can be caused to dissipate in us; and it is so much easier to be a Laodicean—to lean back and just go with the flow. But DON'T DO IT! The very next verse says:

Matthew 24:13 But he that shall endure [those who don't give up] unto the end, the same shall be saved.

Those are the ones who are going to be saved—those who don't "faint" and give in. This is why it is so important. Don't be deceived that God doesn't love you, just because it appears to our carnal inclinations that He isn't around. Oh yes, He is! He is "the God who is there." God is not only Sovereign—meaning He not only rules over everything that is—but, He is also Omniscient, which means that He sees everything that is going on.

What a mind! Don't ask me how He does it. I don't know. At the same time He is aware of what's going on in Canada, He's also aware of what's going on in Australia. That gives us some sort of an idea of the difference between His capabilities and our capabilities. We don't even know what's going on in a single room like this. If our kid is in one room of the house and we are in another room of the house, we get all worried. "What's that kid doing? He's been quiet for the last half hour."

If we were God, we would know. I think that's why my father-in-law always said, "Every time you see your kid, give him a spanking. If he isn't coming out of trouble, he's going right into it; so you are justified."

What's important in this whole picture is LOVE. That's why Jesus mentioned it, in verse 12. Then He follows that up with what He said in verse 13. Those whose love endures are going to make it. That's the short story between Matthew 24: 12 and 13. What we have to understand is that this is what makes John 17: 23 so important. Here's why.

Romans 5: 1-4 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations [trials, tests] also: knowing that tribulation works [or, produces] patience; and patience, experience. [In modern translations, that word "experience" is turned into character.] And patience, character; and character, hope: and hope makes [us] not ashamed...

Maybe we fail, or whatever; and, if we fail, we are ashamed. But hope makes us not ashamed—because it will motivate us to go on, and on, and on.

Romans 5: 5 Hope makes us not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, which is given unto us.

The love that Jesus is talking about there in Matthew 24: 12 is *this* love. That was His concern. The *love that comes from God* is able to endure the troubles, the trials, and the tribulations of the whole end time IF we will use it. And in order to use it (since we have already been given it), we have to believe that God loves us. If we do, then we will send the love that He gives to us (1) right back to Him in submission and obedience in the first four Commandments and (2) out to our brethren in the keeping of the last six Commandments.

This little section goes on because, after Paul wrote verse 5, he must have been moved to feel

that he needed to give proof that God has already demonstrated His love for us. How did he do it?

Romans 5: 6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

Do you see that word "for"? It is pointing to an explanation for what he stated in verse 5. Verse 5 is the one in which he states that the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts. In verse 6, he is beginning to make an explanation of how we can know that God loves us. So he begins by saying, "While we were yet without strength"—meaning before we were converted, before we had added to us the strength, the power, the glory of the love of God. So, "when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely..." Now he's going to explain this again.

Romans 5: 7 For [begins the explanation] scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet perhaps for a good man some would even dare to die. But...

The word "but" indicates a contrast is going to be given. What he is going to do here is contrast the love of God and His demonstration of it to what a man will do under very, very narrow circumstances.

Romans 5: 8 But God commends His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

The King James Version says "commends." What that means is *proves*. That Greek word means proves. God proves His love. It can also be translated *demonstrates*. God demonstrates His love. It can also mean *manifests*. God manifests His love. It can also mean *evidences*. God evidences His love for us—in that He gave Christ to be the sacrifice for our sins.

So He first demonstrated His love by giving Christ. Then He demonstrated His love and made it very personal by calling us. You were specifically chosen by the Father Himself. It was NOT general. It was specific. I want to show this to you, so that you understand. Jesus said:

John 6: 44 "No man [no one] can come to Me, except the Father which has sent Me draw Him."

Christ became the sacrifice for our sins, and then God made that sacrifice very personal. He is still manifesting His love, but now it is getting very specific in that He personally selected you and me out of the billions of people on earth and dragged us into the church.

I kid you not, because that is what John 6: 44 can mean. It can be translated that God drags us

to Jesus Christ, because we don't come easily. We kick and fight against Him. But He is so persistent in His purpose, and so smooth in the way that He does things. He can make us think that we volunteered, but we didn't.

And then it says, in Romans 2, that He granted us repentance. He personally manifested His love in enabling us to repent. This is why grace is so extolled in the Bible, and why salvation is by grace. We would never come if God said, "Hey, come here to Me." It's good to learn how resistant human nature is to God.

Romans 8:7 The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

If God didn't follow through with our calling and practically drag us into the church, we wouldn't come. Romans 8:7 proves that. The carnal mind is at war against God! So, when it says that Christ died for us while we were yet sinners, it doesn't stop there. God's expression of His love leads Him to make it possible for us to come before Him, and then it leads us—enables us, gives us the power—to be able to make the right connections in our brain so that we will feel guilty and repent.

Then He gives us His Spirit. He doesn't do this because He owes it to us. He gives it to us because He loves. Nobody is twisting His arm. It's a free gift to us. And with that Spirit comes His love, which is shed abroad in our heart. It is this love that enables us to keep His commandments—which we would never do. If we were left up to our own devices, we would never do it.

He works on our minds so that we will feel the necessity of submitting to Him. Salvation is a free gift because God loves us. And this is the way that He is demonstrating it—by enabling us to do the things that He commands us to do. It's really awesome!

Now I want you to turn to Romans 8, and I'm going to go to a scripture that I used in a sermon just prior to the one with all of the titles that God gives to us. This one really struck me personally in a way that it never had before, when I began to realize what he was saying here.

I am going to connect this to Romans 5: 6-8, where it says that while we were yet sinners Christ died for the ungodly. And so we wonder, "Will God ever abandon us? Will God never follow through by giving us whatever it is that we need, in whatever trial we are going through? Will He just withdraw so that we are left to our own devices?" Actually, verse 32 of Romans 8 supplies the answer. And when we understand it, in easy to understand modern English, it really adds to Romans 5: 6-8.

Romans 8:31 What shall we then say to these things?

What things? Well, that all things work together for good to those who are the called and who love God (in verse 28). So, what shall we say to these things?

Romans 8: 31 If God be for us, who can be against us?

We have no enemy that can stand before God. No enemy, no circumstance—nothing—can stand before God. Now, do we have that confidence that God loves us to such an extent that He will never withhold what we need in any circumstance? I think in order to appreciate this we have to understand about His Sovereignty and about His Omniscience. He rules over all. Nobody can stand against Him. And He knows everything that is going on. Time and chance NEVER happen to His children. Never! And I mean that. There are no random occurrences that happen to the children of God.

John Reid just taught me this one, and that one made me spin too—because you know that verse in Ecclesiastes where it says that time and chance happens to all things? It doesn't mean what we think it means. All that word "chance" means in the Hebrew is circumstances that we never thought of. It's that simple.

When we make our plans to do this, that, and the other thing—we don't have minds like God that can think about every possibility that might occur. And so, when something happens that we didn't think of, "Oh, it was just a lucky occurrence." (Or, an unlucky occurrence.) No, it was not. Solomon is just saying "You didn't think of this. It wasn't chance at all."

If you want to prove this, you can look it up in The Expositor's Commentary. They said that there was no randomness indicated in this word. It is simply something we didn't think of occurring. We left it out of our planning, but the possibility was always there that it would occur. So it looks like it was a random thing to us, but it was not.

As soon as John told me that, I thought "Yeah." With God working in your life, He is pushing the buttons everywhere to make sure that you and I are saved and that we never get into something that is over our head. No chance occurrences for His kids. He is always there making sure that what happens to them is within their capabilities of dealing with it.

Now, this doesn't mean that we are going to do everything perfectly. We are not going to do everything right. But they are within the capabilities, and God has passed judgment on whatever turns up. If you want to be sure that God will always be there, under every circumstance, this next verse is something that Paul offers us to think about.

Romans 8: 32 He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, [Here it comes.] how shall He not with Him [that is, with Christ] also freely give us *all things*?

I want you to think back again to the relationship between these two as they were planning out the Creation—the recreation of God—of Himself in us. There came a time when they knew that man was going to sin, and that somehow or another the penalty for sin had to be overcome, and that the only way sin can be paid for is DEATH. The wages of sin is death. There was going to have to be a payment made that was so great that it would pay for the sins of every human being who ever lived for all time.

There was only one Life that could do that. It could not be a human. It had to be God—the Creator Himself. The Father had to give up, had to sacrifice, the one He loved the most; and the Son agreed. That's the only thing—the only sacrifice, the only payment—that would be adequate.

How much does He love us? So much that He gave up the thing, the Being, the Person He loved the most. So He loves YOU just as much as He loved Him. That's how much YOU are worth.

In verse 32, Paul says that by the time we are converted, by the time we have repented and have His Spirit, and we are going down the road to His Kingdom—he is saying in affect that for the Father and the Son the hard part is over. Everything else that the Father needs to give is going to be easy. It's a piece of cake. He's already done the hardest thing. And so Paul reasoned this: *How shall He not with Him also freely (meaning willingly, arms wide open) give us whatever we need?*

Do we believe it? It's God's Word. We'd better, because our salvation hinges on whether we believe that God loves us. I've given you the proof—right out of God's Word. How much? So much that He *gave His Son*. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. There's no more that He can do that is any greater. That's awesome!

That's why Jesus could come to the conclusion that He loves each one of us every bit as much as He loves the Son. And that's how much your life is worth. If you had been the only one who ever sinned, He would have done it.

I want to give you one more illustration, and that is from the life of Abraham and Isaac. It's the time that God told Abraham to go and sacrifice his son. It's interesting that He told him to go to a place that allowed Abraham three days to think before he actually got there.

I don't know at what point in time Abraham made up his mind that he was going to go through with it. But God still, nonetheless, allowed Abraham and Isaac to go to the top of that mountain and put everything in order. Isaac was tied right on top of the pile of wood, and apparently the knife was on its way down. Right at the last moment, God intervened and said, "Stop."

When that was over, Abraham came up with a name for God. "The God who is there." God didn't look like He was there, but He was. He didn't appear. But it was the ultimate test in Abraham's life, and a parallel of what God Himself had to go through. Abraham had to give up that which he loved the most.

Do you understand? This is what sets the standard (1) for what love is and (2) how far God, under certain circumstances, is going to push us to find out whether we love Him to the extent of our ability. That's what has to be proved to Him. This is the basis of loyalty—love. And those who love are loyal.

Now, in Psalm 84, we will close on this verse. I want to tie this to the kind of things that we go through—just like Abraham went through.

Psalm 84:11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield...

It didn't look that way to Abraham, as though God was a sun and a shield—but He was. He

stopped Abraham short of sacrificing Isaac, and so God shielded him from that.

Psalm 84: 11 The LORD will give grace and glory.

He gave grace to Abraham. He gave grace to Isaac, in sparing his life. And glory is going to come to them. But note the rest of this verse, which really applies to you and to me.

Psalm 84: 11 No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.

That is His promise. Never will He ever withhold anything that is necessary for our salvation. This can go in every direction, because we might only think of it in *good things*. God will never withhold good things. You know what, that's right. What we have to do is adjust our thinking about what is good. And this is the conclusion that Pat Higgins came to—that really helped him, and me too, very much.

Paul saw clear evidence in the Bible that what he was going through—a very difficult trial—was actually a gift from God. It was good. Think about that. Do you think that Job went through a difficult time? He lost that which he most respected in life—his health, his family, and his wealth. He was wiped out.

Do you think Job was a better man at the end of the book than he was at the beginning? Absolutely, he was! What Job went through was good for Job. God is Sovereign. God is Omniscient. He knows what you are going through, and it is highly likely that (like with Job) He designed it. It is a gift from Him to go through these trials—because out of these trials (IF we continue to believe that He loves us) will come something far better than we ever would have been had we not gone through that trial with God at our side. He is "the God who is there."