

Josh Payne
SESSION 1 | The Love of God

I. Defining the Love of God's Love

Intrinsic and Independent

Action and Feeling

Related to other attributes – goodness, mercy, kindness, compassion, grace.

“Granted, this love is not the essence of God in the sense that it is the center and core of God’s being and the other attributes are its modes, for all the attributes are equally God’s being. In him there is no higher and lower, no greater and smaller. Still, love is most certainly identical with God’s being. It is independent, eternal, unchangeable, like God himself. It has its origin in him and also – by way of his creatures – returns to him.” Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Vol 2: God and Creation*, gen ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 215-16.

“Goodness in God, writes Berkhof, is ‘that perfection in God which prompts him to deal bountifully and kindly with all his creatures. It is the affection which the Creator feels towards his sentient creatures as such’ (*Systematic Theology*, p. 70, citing Ps. 145:9, 15-16; compare Lke 6:35; Acts 14:17): Of this goodness God’s love is the supreme and most glorious manifestation. ‘Love, generally,’ wrote James Orr, ‘is that principle which leads one moral being to desire and delight in another, and reaches its highest form in that personal fellowship in which each lives in the life of the other, and finds his joy in imparting himself to the other, and in receiving back the outflow of that other’s affection unto himself’ (*Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, III, 153). Such is the love of God.” J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993) 123

“It is an outgoing of God’s kindness.” Packer , *Knowing God*, 123

II. The Love of God within the Trinity

A. The Father and the Son

“And behold, a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17, see also Matthew 17:5)

“The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.” (John 3:35-36, see also 5:1-29, 14:30-31).

“As the Father has loved me, so have I 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.” (John 15:9-10)

“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous, Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.” (John 17:24-26)

“Before he ever created, before he ever ruled the world, before anything else, this God was a Father loving his Son.” Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 21.

It is fundamental to who God is, as a Father, to give out life. “Thus love is not something the Father *has*, merely one of his many moods. Rather he *is* love. He could not not love. If he did not love, he would not be Father.” Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 26.

“For eternity, the Father so loves the Son that he excites the Son’s eternal love in response; Christ so loves the church that he excites our love in response; the husband so loves his wife that he excites her to love him back. Such is the spreading goodness that rolls out of the very being of God.” Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 29.

B. The Spirit

No explicit mention of the love between the Father and the Spirit or the Son and the Spirit.

Michael Reeves notes how the Spirit is active in both creation and in Jesus’ ministry, so the Spirit is also involved in the love between the Father and the Son. Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 29-32.

C. Eternally and independently, God is love. All love in creation comes from him.

I John 4:7-21

“According to Scripture God is the sum total of all perfections...All virtues are present in him in an absolute sense...His goodness, accordingly, is one with his absolute perfection....He does not have to become anything, but is what he is eternally. He has no goal outside himself but is self-sufficient, all-sufficient...He receives nothing, but only gives. All things need him; he needs nothing other than himself. Inasmuch as he himself is the absolutely good and perfect one, he may not love anything else except with a view to himself. He may not and cannot be content with less than absolute perfection. When he loves others, he loves himself in them: his own virtues, works, and gifts.” Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Vol 2: God and Creation*, gen ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 211.

“At bottom...[God] is the Father, loving and giving life to his Son in the fellowship of the Spirit. A God who is in himself love, who before all things could ‘never be anything but love.’ Having such a God happily changes everything.” Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 38.

III. The Love of God toward creation and mankind

“It is indeed possible to speak of God’s love to creatures or people in general (the love of benevolence), but for this the Scripture mostly uses the word ‘goodness,’ and as a rule speaks of God’s love, like his grace, only in relation to his chosen people or church (the love of friendship).” Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 215.

A. Love toward creation

“The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made....They eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.” Ps. 145:9, 15-16 (see also Gen. 1:10, 18, 21, 25, 31; Ps. 104:10-18, 21, 27-28; Matt. 6:25-34)

B. Love toward mankind

“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 do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, 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.” Matt. 5:43-48 (see also Luke 6:35).

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” John 3:16-17 (see also John 1:29, 4:42, 6:33, 6:51, 8:12, 9:5, 12:47, I John 2:2).

“As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?” Ezek. 33:11 (see also 18:23, 1 Tim 2:4, 2 Pet. 3:9).

In love, God genuinely offers Jesus as Savior to all mankind, and he genuinely desires that all mankind will receive him.

God’s sovereign election of only some of mankind does not contradict his genuine saving love toward all mankind.

IV. The love of God toward his saints

“The form of divine love most central to Scripture’s message is the love of God in saving sinners.” John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief*, (Phillipsburg, NJ; P&R Publishing), 239.

“The NT typically defines love (both the love of God and the love required of believers) by reference to the cross of Christ.” Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 240.

A. Electing love

“It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” Deuteronomy 7:7-8 (see also 9:4-6, 10:14-15; Mal. 1:2-3;)

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will...” Eph 1:3-5

“We love because he first loved us” I John 4:19

“In conversion, God brings us to act contrary to our depraved will, and in accordance with a new will given by grace... So *coercion* is not the best word to describe what happens in conversion. The problem is not that *coercion* connotes too much divine control, but rather too little. God does not need to coerce, for he has control of our hearts and thus makes us believe without any sense of being forced.” Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 241-42.

B. Atoning Love

“God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:8)

“In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” I John 4:9-10

“To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood” Rev. 1:5

John 3:16, Rom. 8:2 Cor. 5:14, Gal 2:20, Eph. 2:4, Eph 5:2, Eph. 5:25-33, I John 3:16,

“The measure of love is how much it gives, and the measure of the love of God is the gift of his only Son to become human, and to die for sins, and so to become the one mediator who can bring us to God....the New Testament writers constantly point to the cross of Christ as the crowning proof of the reality and boundlessness of God’s love.” J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 125.

C. Covenant love

OT: steadfast love (*hesed*)

The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the

guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.” Exodus 34:6-7

Deut 7:9-11; I Chron. 16:34, 41; 2 Chron. 7:3,6, 20:21; Ps. 6:4, 31:16, 69:16, 89:2, 92:2, 107, 108, 136.

Family analogies: Children and Marriage

“As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.” Ps. 103:13

Ezek. 16:8; Hos. 1-3, 11:1; Mal. 2:14

NT: God binds us to himself in Christ

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.” John 17:20-26

John 14:23, 15:13, 16:27

The family analogies are used in the NT as well.

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. I John 3:1

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. Eph. 5:25-32

The love of God toward us in Christ is sincere, deep, close, and utterly reliable.

“The love of God who is spirit is no fitful, fluctuating thing, as human love is, nor is it a mere impotent longing for things that may never be; it is, rather, a spontaneous determination of God’s whole being in an attitude of benevolence and benefaction, an attitude freely chosen and firmly fixed. There are no inconsistencies or vicissitudes in the love of the almighty God who is spirit.” Packer, *Knowing God*, 121.

“Through setting his love on human beings God has voluntarily bound up his own final happiness with theirs. It is not for nothing that the Bible habitually speaks of God as the loving Father and Husband of his people. It follows from the very nature of these relationships that God’s happiness will not be complete till all his beloved ones are finally out of trouble.” Packer, *Knowing God*, 124-125.

D. Reassuring Love

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

“For your 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 rulers, 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.” Romans 8:35-39

Rom. 5:35

“Knowing this, we are able to apply to ourselves the promise that all things work together for good to them that love God and are called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28). Not just some things, but all things! Every single thing that happens to us expresses God’s love to us, and comes to us from the furthering of God’s purpose for us. Thus, so far as we are concerned God is love to us – holy, omnipotent love – at every moment and in every event of every day’s life. Even when we cannot see the why and wherefore of God’s dealings, we know that there is love in and behind them, and so we can rejoice always, even when, humanly speaking, things are going wrong. We know that the true story of our life, when known, will prove to be, as the hymn says, ‘mercy from first to last’ – and we are content.”

E. Other themes: Sanctifying Love, Conditional Love, Individual and Corporate Love

V. Application: What do we do with God's love?

Know

'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 power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." Eph. 3:14-21

Love

Cultivate amazement, gratefulness, worship, trust by study and meditation on the love of God.

Knowledge of the love of God should also produce a hatred of sin.

Imitate

"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Eph. 5:1-2