

## ***“The Father’s Great Love”***

### **1 John 4:9-10**

Our responsibility to God can be summed up in one word, love. We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our might. This is how we fulfil His law. It seems simple, doesn’t it? Yet, I would guess that for most of us putting it into practice is extremely difficult.

What motivates us to love and obey God? What warms our affections for the Almighty One? Is it the dread of His severe chastening? Is it the thundering of His holy law? The Apostle John presents us with the answer. “We love God,” he says, “because He first loved us.” The much needed motivation is to be found in a growing knowledge and willing acceptance of God’s great love for us. Our duty is a response to His grace. Robert Murray M’Cheyne understood this well when he wrote:

“What parent does not know that the true way to gain the obedience of a child is to gain the affection of the child? And do you think God, who gave us wisdom, does not Himself know? Do you think He would set about obtaining the obedience of His children, without first of all gaining their affection? To gain our affections, which by nature rove over the face of the world, and centre anywhere but in Him, God has sent His Son into the world to bear the curse of our sins.”

The purpose of the Apostle John in 1 John 4:9-10 is to deepen our understanding of the Father’s love. We see love magnified by God’s grand design, by our rebellious attitude and by God’s suffering Son. To meditate on such a glorious theme should stir our affections and increase our desire to love and obey God.

### **Love Magnified by God’s Grand Design**

God demonstrates His love for us in that He sent His only begotten Son into the world (1 John 4:9). This is a profound revelation. God’s love is an active love. He loves us in word *and* in deed. The sending of His Son into the world is proof of His love. Yet, the Father’s act of sending the Son is not the full manifestation of His love. Jesus came as a means of achieving God’s grand design for His beloved children. God sent His Son, says John, “that we might live through Him.” Jesus came to give life, and it is in this renewal of life that God demonstrates His love.

On the sixth day of creation God formed man of the dust of the ground and imparted life to him (Gen. 2:7). Adam was a living being in the fullest sense of that expression. He was alive physically, but also spiritually. He even had opportunity to enter into a state of eternal life. God issued a command to His newly formed creature: “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Obedience to this command would have maintained Adam in a state of life, disobedience would introduce death.

Shortly after this command was given Adam unknowingly encountered his arch enemy, Satan. Satan came in the form of a serpent, with the evil intention of deceiving Adam. Satan had an agenda; he had a grand design of his own. He wanted to destroy the principle of life in God’s image bearer. He challenged the Creator’s command and tempted

Adam to rebel. We know the tragic outcome, Adam disobeyed and death entered the world.

Death has reigned over man ever since. The sending of the Son is God's response to this ancient problem. Motivated by love, God refuses to abandon His children to eternal death. The restoration of life is a sovereign, gracious gift. We did nothing to make it happen. How could we, we were dead in our sins and trespasses? We contributed to our new birth as much as Lazarus contributed to his resurrection from the dead. In Christ, God disrupts the plans of Satan (1 John 3:8) and secures success for His grand design.

What is meant by the restoration of life? To give life is to restore to man what was lost in the fall. God renews His peaceful relationship and sweet fellowship with His children. He renews our minds and restores knowledge. He removes Satan's lie and replaces it with Divine truth. He replaces the principle of sin with the seed of righteousness, enabling us to know and keep His law. John says, "Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God." Renewed life also means renewed love. If we have life we also have a love for God and for His children. The great themes of John's first epistle are the evidences of new life in Christ (1 John 1:3, 2:20, 27; 3:9-10).

What love the Father has for us! Consider His grand design and marvel in His mercy and love. We were dead, but now we have eternal life in Christ.

### **Love Magnified By Our Rebellious Attitude**

God's love is magnified by His restoration of life. It is magnified even more when we consider our attitude to God when He lavished His love upon us. Surely He saw something in us worthy of such love, some hint of sorrow for sin and desire for God? Not according to John. He expressed His love while we had no interest whatsoever in Him. "In this is love, **NOT THAT WE LOVED GOD...**"

Since the entrance of sin into the world man has lived in rebellion against God. We constantly assert our independence and autonomy. We refuse to submit to His wisdom and rule. His ways truly are not our ways. Accompanying this rebellion is a fervent hatred. We despise God, His laws and His people. Cain's murder of Abel was an expression of this hatred (1 John 3:12). To murder Abel was high handed treason against Abel's Master. We, like Cain, shake our fist in anger at God with every thought, word and action.

Any earthly King would utterly destroy citizens showing such a vehement hatred to the crown. God as a just judge hates us in our sin. In such a state we are called children of wrath. This is why Christ is sent to be a propitiatory sacrifice. Yet, Christ was sent while we were in rebellion with His Father. Christ was sent by the Father to bring peace.

How can we even begin to grasp this? This is an astonishing display of love. While our hearts despised God He sent His Son as a gift. This defies all conventional wisdom. Jesus once said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friend." This no doubt is true. It is a sign of great love for one to give his life for a FRIEND.

Yet, God has done something greater. He sent His only begotten Son to lay down His life for an ENEMY[!.] Hear the Apostle Paul, “For when we were without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

If this knowledge does not soften the hardness of our hearts I do not know what can. What a marvellous demonstration of love. For God to love the ungodly, for the Holy One to favour the unholy, is truly amazing.

### **Love Magnified By God’s Suffering Son**

God is represented in this passage as the giver of a gift. John says “God sent His only begotten Son into the world.” Oftentimes the quality and costliness of the gift represents the greatness of the giver’s love. A few months ago I was watching my oldest son, Stephen, play with his younger brother, Evan. I was encouraged to see Stephen sharing many of his toys with Evan. However, there was a limit to Stephen’s generosity. Under no circumstance would Stephen share his most cherished toys. To use a positive example, it was a singular testimony of Mary’s love for Christ that she used a very expensive oil to anoint His feet (John 12:3).

God gave His only begotten Son, His special treasure, to sinners. There could be no costlier gift. There are many sons of God, but only one with the special title ONLY BEGOTTEN. Jesus was greatly beloved and cherished by His Father. He was His Father’s delight. Yet, the Father has such a great love for us that He sent His dearly loved Son to be born of a woman, born under the law.

One would expect Christ to enter the world with great pomp and show. Surely He would come as a mighty ruler of men, abounding in riches? No, He came as the Lamb of God. He was sent to be the propitiation for our sins. John uses the word propitiation early in chapter two and again here. In both texts Christ’s work of propitiation is directly connected with “our sins.” A propitiation is a sacrifice to remove God’s judicial wrath. Christ was sent by the Father to be a substitutionary sacrifice. He came to bear the full weight of Divine justice and Holy anger for “our sins.”

Christ was sent as a suffering servant. It is no wonder He evidenced such anxiety as the day of His crucifixion approached. In Gethsemane He sweat drops of blood as He pleaded with His Father to remove the cup of His wrath. Yet, He knew that it was the will of the Father. On the cross He cried out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?” The Father forsook His Son for you and me. Through His death God’s grand design of renewed life was made possible.

As a result of Christ’s propitiatory sacrifice God’s anger is removed from us. We are now at peace with God. All our sins have been cleansed. We are right with God. These blessings are ours because God sent His only begotten Son as an expression of His love.

What are we to do with such a rich teaching? We are to behold the Father's love, to make it our chief study, to meditate upon it, and to rest peacefully in it. If you are downcast, perplexed with doubts and fears, then refresh yourself in the Father's love. Let it motivate you to renewed zeal in the service of the Lord.

How deep the Father's love for us,  
How vast beyond all measure,  
That He would give His only Son  
To make a wretch His treasure.  
How great the pain of searing loss;  
The Father turns His face away,  
As wounds which mar the chosen One  
Bring many sons to glory.

Stuart Townend, b. 1963