

The Gift of Love

As we continue in this advent season, I want us to focus on the giver of the gifts.

James 1:17 "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning."

I want us to look at three aspects of God's love:

1. God's nature of love

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love." 1 John 4:7-8

There are many aspects of God's nature. He is just, kind, friendly, but he has only one essence. His essence is love.

Essence means formal existence; that which makes anything to be what it is; or rather, the peculiar nature of a thing; the very substance.

God doesn't love humanity because of how he feels but because of who he is.

Many years ago I was studying the names of God in an attempt to teach us that God is trustworthy and one day I was studying one of his names, and I heard this still small voice say, "All God's plans flow from his nature and all of his promises are backed by his nature."

The first question I asked myself is, why did God create the heavens and the Earth? The answer is because his nature is to create. The name Elohim means creator God.

Next, I asked myself, why did God create humanity? The answer was because God's nature is love.

God needed a way to express his nature of love, so he created man. So the truth is, you were created as the object of God's affection.

Love cannot function outside of the context of relationship. So God's plan was always that his children would live with him in a relationship based on dependency and trust.

Many years ago, I was talking to a Christian brother of mine about the love of God. He had this belief that God was always out to get him. He believed that God would cause all kinds of harm towards his children. Then God would be glorified when he rescues them. He made the statement, "If God really loved us, he would never have put the

second tree in the garden." I tried to explain to him that love demands a choice, that God never wanted slaves that would follow him by design, but a family who would follow him by choice.

2. God's gift of love for us.

The most famous Bible verse about God's love is John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

It is important for us to understand that God's love for us is not based on our ability to perform or keep his commandments, but it is based entirely on his nature of love.

God loves you just like he loves Jesus.

"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." John 17:23 NKJV

When you and I were born again, we received the nature of God.

"Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." Romans 5:5 NKJV

Galatians 5:22-23 [TPT] But the fruit produced by the Holy Spirit within you is divine love in all its varied expressions: joy that overflows, peace that subdues, patience that endures, kindness in action, a life full of virtue, faith that prevails, gentleness of heart, and strength of spirit.

3. The gift of love for others.

God gave us the ability to love just like him. As a matter fact, Jesus said it is the way that people know that we are his disciples.

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:34-35

In our English language, there is only one word for love. So when you say you love this weather, I love ribeye steak, or I love my pet, or I love my spouse, or I love God, does it all mean the same thing?

Is your love for God on the same level as your love for your pet? Is your love for your spouse on the same level as your love for food?

Four Greek words for love:

The first Greek word for love is eros, which refers to romantic or sexual love. From it we get the word erotic.

The second is storge, which refers to familial love, like that of a mother for her baby or of a brother and sister for each other.

The third Greek word for love is philia, and it refers to friendship and comradery. This is where the word Philadelphia comes from and why they call it the city of brotherly love. Unless you go to watch an Eagles game where their fans will throw snowballs at Santa.

Finally, agape is used to speak of God's love that He has for the world and that Christians are supposed to emulate.

The unselfish giving of oneself for the highest good of another. Loving like Jesus.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father 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?" Matthew 5:43-46 NKJV

Jesus has given you his unconditional love (the unselfish giving of oneself for the highest good of another), so that you can give it away to others.

This is not talking about a feeling but about a decision to love others unconditionally because that is how God loves.

"For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer." 2 Corinthians 5:14-16 NKJV

The love that we received from Christ should compel us to no longer live for ourselves, but God and others.

"Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" Matthew 22:37-39 NKJV

How different would our lives be if we got up every day with the mindset of putting God and others above ourselves.

Do you realize that most of the hardship you've experienced in your life is because Satan tempted you to do something based on what was best for you, only to find out after the momentary satisfaction, you were left feeling empty and unsatisfied.

When you live for God and others there is no way for Satan to tempt you to live for yourself.

The second thing Christ's love compels us to do is to see others based on God's design for them.

"Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer." 2 Corinthians 5:16

When you see people after the flesh you are seeing them based on their current circumstances.

The flesh sees someone walking down the road with all of their earthly possessions in a grocery cart and you think, why don't you get your act together and get a job?

Love on the other hand, sees someone created in the image of God and is moved with compassion to bless them.

The woman caught an adultery.

"When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." John 8:10-11 NKJV

Seeing people after the flesh leads to condemnation, love leads to reconciliation and restoration.

The last aspect of love I want to talk about today is that love is to be present.

I believe when Jesus ministered to people, he made them feel like they were the only ones on earth. He was fully present and hung on their every word.

We live in a culture where people can be together in the same room, or at the same table, but emotionally they are on different parts of the planet. How many times have you been to a restaurant and seen a couple sitting together, playing on their phones the whole time and never saying a word to each other?

Love is present, it's focused attention on the person that you are spending time with. People feel the most valued when someone is giving them their undivided attention.

This Christmas season let's make it a priority to give people the gift of our presence.