

The Greatest Gift Ever

What's the most important thing a person needs to know?
The love of God.

In Ephesians 3:17-19, Paul prays, "...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..." Our world is torn up because we do not know this love. It is this love that John describes for us in our text:

John 3:16-18

16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. **17** 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. **18** Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

I. We must know the height of His love

God's love is not separated from God's holiness and justice. This is not the love of a permissive uncle nor of a distant father. His love is not just an emotion, but a deep commitment. His love exists in perfect harmony with all of His glorious attributes.

II. We must know the breadth of His love

There are two ways in which we need to consider the breadth of this word "world."

a. He loves the world—not just Israel.

This was ground-breaking. Some scholars say it was unprecedented. He loves people everywhere, of all types.

b. He loves sinners.

This is even more groundbreaking! In John's Gospel "the world" almost always means the fallen created order. In his first epistle, John teaches us not to love the world:

"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever." (1 John 2:15-17)

DA Carson: "God's love is to be admired not because the world is so big and includes so many people, but because the world is so bad."

When a lover pursues his beloved, he recounts her many admirable traits. That's why he loves her, and she him. In premarital counseling, when we ask people why they want to marry each other, we pastors will often hear about the person's mate: he/she is great with people, kind, beautiful, spiritually-minded, best friend. Popular song lyrics in my youth reflected this same approach to love: "Well I think I'm going out of my head"; "I'm hooked on a feeling"; "she loves you, yea, yea, yea"; "I want to hold your hand"; etc.

But what if they say about each other that they have the face of a gorilla and the body of a cow and the personality of a hyena, And they want to marry anyway. Although we would probably advise against the marriage, this, actually, is more like God's love!

III. We must know the depth of His love

We come to know the depth of His love by examining two things in this text: our predicament and His solution.

a. Our predicament

Notice in this text and others that we are told our predicament: we are going to perish—we are headed for destruction: look at vv.17,18, 36.

b. His solution

He "gave" is in the aorist tense, suggesting an act, a historical event. Indeed He did something in time and space that rescued us. He gave His only begotten Son.

What parent can imagine doing this?

Notice also that His solution includes our believing "into" Him.

And when we believe, we are actually saved. This is not just a show, but an act. What if someone said he wanted to show his love for Memphis by entering a burning house? Would that really be love? But if he actually rescued a child from perishing, that *would* be love.

Jesus actually rescued us by His death and resurrection.

This is why Frederick Lehman wrote his famous hymn:

Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made;
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.

IV. We must know the length of His love

When Jesus saves us, He saves us forever. And that eternal love enters our hearts right now, in time and space. After an amazing career as a famous journalist, Malcolm Muggeridge became a believer in Christ at age 65. Looking back on his life, he once remarked:

"I may, I suppose, regard myself, or pass for being, as a relatively successful man. People occasionally stare at me in the streets—that's fame. I can fairly easily earn enough to qualify for admission to the higher slopes of the Internal Revenue—that's success. Furnished with money and a little fame even the elderly, if they care to, may partake of trendy diversions—that's pleasure. It might happen once in a while that something I said or wrote was sufficiently heeded for me to persuade myself that it represented a serious impact on our time—that's fulfillment. Yet I say to you—and I beg you to believe me—multiply these tiny triumphs by a million, add them all together, and they are nothing—less than nothing, a positive impediment—measured against one draught of that living water Christ offers to the spiritually thirsty, irrespective of who or what they are."

Discussion Questions

1. How do our misunderstandings about love sometimes obscure or distort a proper understanding of God's love?

2. Describe the breadth of God's love. How does this dimension of His love challenge and encourage us in our walk with Him?

3. What do we learn in this text about the problem God came to solve? What's His solution? Why is His solution so amazing?

4. How can we appropriate the gift of eternal life in our present experience? What difference does this gift make to us today?

Going Deeper

1. In what ways do you need to grasp more deeply the love of God for you?

2. In what ways do you need to reflect and express the love of God more fully in your life?

3. What steps can you take to address 1 and 2 above?