

2 - THE LOVE OF GOD

A SIMPLE MESSAGE – JESUS LOVES ME

The simple hymn, “Jesus Loves Me,” summarizes the basic message of Christianity. The song reminds us of five important truths that help us grow into maturity by finding our peace and security in Jesus.

Jesus loves me this I know,
For the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to Him belong,
They are weak, but He is strong!

Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me.
Yes, Jesus loves me!
The Bible tells me so.

1. When I know that I am loved by Jesus, I am drawn to Him.
2. When the conviction that He loves me is based on what the Bible says, rather than my feelings, I will be able to experience inner peace and security, no matter what circumstances I am in.
3. When I understand that I belong to Jesus because He created and redeemed me, I am free to serve Him out of love and appreciation, rather than out of fear of punishment or a desire to earn His favor.
4. When I remember that I am weak and helpless to do anything good on my own, I will remain humble and dependent upon Him.
5. When I remember that He is strong and has already conquered the enemy, I am free to live without fear, trusting in His power and providence every day.

If I forget or neglect any one of these truths, I will find it easier to trust in myself, rather than in Jesus for my life and salvation.

DIMENSIONS OF GOD'S LOVE

1. What did Paul pray that we might experience? Ephesians 3:17-19

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____
- D. _____

Paul wants us to be so “rooted and grounded” in the love of Christ that we may want to “be filled with all the fullness of God.” His love is so:

- Wide - His love encircles the whole human race.
- Long - He is patient when reaching out to everyone.
- High - His love is not mixed with any selfishness.
- Deep - No one has sunk so low that God does not love them.

“Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-8, New Living Translation, Second Edition

GOD LOVES US BECAUSE . . .

2. How does the Bible describe the nature of God? 1 John 4:8-10

3. What was the motivation that led Jesus to be our Savior?

- A. John 3:16, 17 _____
- B. Ephesians 2:4,5 _____
- C. Titus 3:3-7 _____

If God's love for us were based on our goodness or performance, we would be very insecure. For every time we messed up, we would worry that He couldn't love us anymore. However, we experience great security when we learn that God took the initiative to love and redeem the human race before we did anything good.

Early in their marriage, a wife would sometimes ask her husband, "Why do you love me?" After much thought, the husband responded,

"If I say that I love you because you are beautiful, honest, hardworking, a great pianist, a good cook, clean and neat, a wonderful friend, all of the above would be true. But my love for you is not based on those things. If you were in a car wreck and became paralyzed and your face became burned and scarred, I would still love you. I love you because Jesus has loved me and I have committed my heart and my life to you."

Before marriage, the close relationship of a man and woman is based on mutual attraction, enjoying common interests, and sharing similar beliefs and goals. When two people get married, the relationship adds an additional element that provides a solid foundation to build upon: a commitment to each other until death, no matter what the circumstances.

God has chosen to love the human race and be committed to her until the final death separates them from Him. He has taken the initiative to love and redeem the world, but then He gives each person the freedom to choose to live with Him now and forever or to perish (John 3:16).

I DON'T CONDEMN YOU, YOU ARE FREE TO LOVE

4. How do you think the woman felt when she was publicly accused of adultery? How would you have felt if you were her? John 8:2-5.

5. How did Jesus respond to those who accused her? John 8:6-9

Jesus knew the hypocrisy of the accusers. They said they caught the woman in the very act. That means the man would have also been caught. The law they referred to said both the man and the woman should be stoned (Leviticus 20:10). Since the man was let go, Jesus knew they were trying to set a trap for Him. It was a clever trap.

If He said, “Stone her,” they could have said to the Romans, “Jesus is disregarding your authority.” If He said, “The woman should be let go,” they could have accused Him of disregarding the Law of Moses.

Jesus began to quietly write in the dust the sins of the accusers. When they insisted on an answer, Jesus said, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.”

As people began to read out loud what Jesus wrote, all the accusers left, from the eldest to the youngest, convicted by their own conscience.

One commentary says, “Christ Himself did not suppress one word of truth, but He spoke it always in love. He exercised the greatest tact, and thoughtful, kind attention in His intercourse with the people.”

“He was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word, never gave needless pain to a sensitive soul. He did not censure human weakness. He fearlessly denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity, but tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes” Desire of Ages, page 353.

6. How do you think the woman felt when Jesus said to her, “Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more?” John 8:10-12

Jesus gave her hope. She wasn't going to die. She was free to live! But how should she live? Jesus in essence said, "Don't hurt yourself anymore. Don't choose to go back to a life of sin and pain. Discover what God's real plan is for your life! You are free to truly experience God's love that you may learn how to truly love others."

Then Jesus spoke to her and to everyone listening, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" John 8:12. By inviting her to walk in the light He was giving, He was showing her the way to experience freedom from slavery to sin.

7. Does Jesus treat us the same way?

A. John 3:17 "God did not send His Son into the world to _____ the world, but that the _____ through Him might be _____."

B. 2 Corinthians 5:19 "God was in Christ reconciling the _____ to Himself, not imputing (or counting) their _____ to (or against) them."

If the accusers had stayed around and acknowledged their sin, they could have heard the same words Jesus spoke to the woman. The message that the woman heard is the message God is trying to communicate to everyone, "I don't condemn you! You are free to leave your life of sin. Experience my love that you may "love one another as I have loved you" John 15:12. This message could be summed up as:

- Freedom from condemnation precedes freedom from slavery to sin.
- Being treasured precedes being transformed.
- Being loved unselfishly precedes being able to love others unselfishly.
- Experiencing healing precedes being able to help others heal.

AN EXPRESSION OF LOVE; A STORY OF GRACE

8. Read Luke 7:36-50

A. How did the woman express her love for Jesus in a tangible way?

B. What question arose in Simon's mind as a result of her actions?

C. Summarize the parable Jesus shared with Simon.

D. What lesson did Jesus want Simon and the woman to understand?

Simon knew the woman had openly disregarded the law of God. He knew she was a “sinner” and “untouchable.” Jesus knew all were sinners and in need of God’s forgiveness. That is why he came. Simon hadn’t understood the depth of his own sin and the greatness of God’s love.

Those who recognize they have been forgiven much, will love much. Jesus is not encouraging people to commit lots of sinful acts so they can be forgiven much and love much. He is calling us to recognize how great our sin already is. The closer we come to Jesus and understand His love, the more we will:

- See the contrast between His great love and our natural selfishness.
- Understand how much we need a Savior.
- Recognize how amazing God’s grace really is.

HUMAN LOVE VERSUS GOD'S KIND OF LOVE

9. How does Jesus describe God's kind of love in Luke 6:27-31?

“Love your _____, do good to those who _____ you, bless those who _____ you, and _____ for those who _____ you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. _____ to everyone who _____ of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. And just as you _____ men to _____ to you, you also _____ to them likewise.”

If we see this passage as simply a command from Jesus, we would be overwhelmed and say, “Impossible!” But when we see this as a description of how God loves us, we are amazed and drawn to Him. We can also understand this command as a promise. This is the kind of love God will create within us when we give Him permission.

A caution might be appropriate. Jesus says, “Give to everyone who asks of you.” He doesn't say, “Give what they ask of you.” God doesn't give us everything we ask. Out of love for us, He gives us what we need.

One three year old girl was anxious to have a sister to play with. When her mother told her she wouldn't be having any more babies, the girl prayed, “Dear God, please help me to get pregnant.” Her parents were very thankful that God did not say yes to her prayer at that time.

When someone asks us for something, we can lovingly listen to understand the real need and prayerfully seek God's guidance that we might know how He would have us help. Jesus then promises to provide for our needs when we do love others as He has loved us.

“Give, and it will be given to you: . . . For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you” Luke 6:38.

10. How does Jesus describe our natural human love? Luke 6:32-34

Our natural human love is selfish and self-centered. We love as long as we receive love, we give in order to get, and we are kind to others, so that others will be kind to us. But if someone lets us down, mistreats us or takes advantage of us, we tend to withhold our love or seek revenge. Jesus says the Jews were being taught to love only those who loved them. Jesus taught us we should love our enemies also (Matthew 5:43).

11. Who does Jesus say the world loves? John 15:19

The world accepts and enjoys being with those who are like them. They feel comfortable being around those who love “darkness, rather than light, because their deeds were evil” John 3:19.

On the other hand, they feel uncomfortable being around Christians who love truth and righteousness. Even though a Christian may be very loving and say nothing, the person who clings to sin is reminded that what they are doing is wrong. The longer they resist the light, the more they will hate those who love the light (John 3:21).

12. What kinds of works can people do who are motivated by selfishness rather than by love? 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

A. Verse 1 _____

B. Verse 2 _____

C. Verse 3 _____

Some “good works” are very deceiving, for they appear very loving. However, it is possible to do many things motivated by selfishness rather than by love. We can speak eloquently in different languages in

order to seek the applause of the crowds. We can work miracles in order to deceive (Matthew 7:21-23; Rev. 13:13,14). We can give all we have to the poor to make people think we are wonderful. We can even become a martyr to try to earn favor with God, like the suicide bombers.

Many people try to imitate the fruit of righteousness out of a desire for praise, acceptance, or lasting significance. However, God is able to discern “the thoughts and intents of the heart” Hebrews 4:12.

13. How does Jesus illustrate God’s unconditional love? Matthew 5:45

14. How did Jesus say we are to love others? John 13:34,35: 15:12

We need to experience God’s love before we can truly love others with God’s kind of love. Jesus also implies that we will love others the same way we believe that He has loved us: conditionally or unconditionally.

NATURAL HUMAN LOVE IS:	GOD'S LOVE IS:
<p>CONDITIONAL Depends on beauty or goodness and therefore needs arousing</p>	<p>UNCONDITIONAL Is spontaneous, uncaused, and independent of our goodness (see Romans 5:6-10; 2Corinthians 5:19)</p>
<p>CHANGEABLE Fluctuates and is unreliable, based upon emotions and circumstances</p>	<p>CHANGELESS Is everlasting (see Jeremiah 31:3; Romans 8:35-39 and John 13:1)</p>
<p>SELF-SEEKING Seeks acceptance and fulfillment through possessions, performance and power. Tries to be better than others to make themselves valuable</p>	<p>SELF-EMPTYING Is selfless, and therefore will step down for the benefit of others (see 1 Corinthians 13:5; 2 Corinthians 8:9; and Philippians 2:6-8)</p>

UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPEL IS RELATED TO OUR UNDERSTANDING OF GOD’S LOVE

Satan has tried to distort the truth of God’s love to keep us from being drawn by His amazing grace and experiencing the power of the gospel.

When our understanding of God’s love is faulty, it will lead to a perversion of the gospel (Galatians 1:7) and a motivation to serve God out of fear and reward. While there is only one true gospel, the following chart describes different beliefs people have had about how God relates to the human race. It also summarizes various perspectives people have about what happens in the future to those who reject God.

Non-Christian or Atheism	Distorted Gospel	Everlasting Gospel	Distorted Gospel	Distorted Gospel Universalism
God’s favor must be earned / There is no God.	God’s love and grace must be partially earned.	God’s love and grace are given freely to all.	God’s love and grace are given freely to some.	God’s love and grace are given freely to all.
The next life is based on our own works	Salvation is by grace + works	Salvation is by grace alone for all	Salvation is by grace alone for some	Salvation is by grace alone for all
God ↑ Mankind	God ↓ ↑ Mankind	God ↓ Mankind	God ↓ The Elect	God ↓ Mankind
People will suffer longer if they do not do what their “god” wants. / All die. There is no life after death.	People are “lost” because they fail to believe or do enough of what God asks them to do.	People are “lost” and will perish because they love sin and do not want a Savior from sin.	People are “lost” because God chose to save some of the human race. The rest will suffer in eternal fire.	No one will be lost, for God will eventually win the hearts of all now or in the next life.

NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS / ATHEISM

All non-Christian religions are based on a system of works to earn the favor of some god to avoid being cursed and to gain a better afterlife. There is no concept of a Savior from sin. Some choose to believe there is no God at all.

DISTORTION: SALVATION BY GRACE + WORKS

It is hard for us to fully understand God's unconditional love. We feel we need to do something to earn it. Paul described this problem when he wrote, "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ" Gal. 1:6,7.

"Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?" Galatians 3:2,3.

Because of our natural tendency to believe that we must earn something, it is easy to fall into this trap. There are many variations of this idea. A clear understanding of the gospel will enable us to avoid this problem.

THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL

The gospel is not something that we could have reasoned out on our own. It had to be revealed to us. Paul emphasized the gospel came to him through a revelation from God, not from any other source.

"The gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ" Galatians 1:11,12.

Paul learned that God took the initiative to save us all from the wages of sin. "God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" Ephesians 2:4,5.

As "the Savior of the world," Jesus took away "the sin of the world!" (John 4:42; 1:29). Having given Himself as "a ransom for all," Jesus was able to redeem the human race and free us from the fear of death and the power of Satan (1 Timothy 2:6; Colossians 1:12-14; Hebrews 2:14,15).

Through the plan of salvation, God revealed His unconditional love for the human race, while maintaining our freedom of choice. Paul summarizes the message we are to give to the world: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing (or counting) their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.” 2 Corinthians 5:19,20.

In other words, no matter who we are or what we have done, God is not counting anyone's sins against them. We are free to come to Him just as we are. Since God is love, He will not force Himself on anyone or force anyone to come to Him. Everyone is free to embrace or reject God's love and salvation. We choose to be reconciled to God when we believe this good news and embrace Jesus as our Savior and Lord. Those who reject Jesus will cry for the rocks and mountains to fall on them when He returns. They would rather die than come into His presence. God will honor their choice and they will perish in the end. (John 3:16-19,36; Revelation 6:14-16).

DISTORTION: SALVATION BY GRACE FOR SOME

Some say God chose ahead of time to save only some people, while the rest will suffer in eternal hell. This may sound like good news if you are among those whom God chose to save. It is horrible news if you're not, for then you have no hope or choice in the matter. This contradicts 1 John 4:8 which says, “God is love.” Without freedom, what looks like love is actually manipulation.

DISTORTION: UNIVERSALISM

Since Jesus died for everyone, He is not counting anyone's sins against them (2 Corinthians 5:14,15,19). Some have distorted this truth by saying that God will eventually win the hearts of everyone and no one will be lost. Since God is love, they say that He could never leave anyone to burn forever in hell. Therefore, either there is no such thing as hell or some will go there for a short time until they repent. Then everyone will live forever with God.

This distortion also misunderstands God's love. He will never force people to live with Him. God will honor the choices of those who love darkness rather than light and refuse to repent and be reconciled to Him (John 3:19-21; 2 Corinthians 5:19,20; Revelation 6:14-16; 16:9,11; 20:11-14).

Jesus said many would pursue the path that leads to destruction. Instead of living forever, they will perish (John 3:16). At the end, there will be a fire that will cleanse the earth of everything associated with sin (2 Peter 3:10-13). Even death and the grave are pictured as being cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14). In fact, “The last enemy that will be destroyed is death” 1 Corinthians 15:26. Then God will create “a new heaven and a new earth” and “there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, or crying.” Revelation 21:1,4.

LOVE THAT ENDURES OR GROWS COLD

15. Read Revelation 2:1-6

A. How did Jesus describe the activity of those in Ephesus? (2,3)

B. What problem did Jesus identify in the church? (4)

C. What would happen if they refused to repent? (5)

It didn't take long for Satan to lead the church away from understanding the love of God. (Galatians 1:6,7.) People who are very zealous for God can be hurtful to others when they don't have God's love in their hearts. Jesus pleaded with them to “repent and do the first works” motivated by the love of God (1Corinthians 13:1-8; 2 Corinthians. 5:14,15). If they did not repent, He said He would remove their lamp stand. There would be no need for their lamp to remain if their light had gone out.

16. Read Matthew 24:12-14

A. What did Jesus say would grow cold in the lives of many? (12)

B. Why would it grow cold? (12)

C. What truth does Jesus want everyone to know? (14)

Ignoring or rejecting the gospel will always lead to the increase of lawlessness and love growing cold. Out of insecurity, people will take advantage of others to get what they want. Hurt people will always hurt others, who will in turn hurt more people. This pattern will continue to repeat itself unless someone experiences the unconditional love of God and chooses to forgive those who have hurt them.

Jesus wants everyone to hear the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). Those who embrace the gospel will experience God's unconditional love and forgiveness. This enables them to love and forgive others, rather than hold onto selfishness and bitterness. Finding security in Christ will lead to the love that endures to the end.

BROKEN DREAMS

By Robert J. Burdette

As children bring their broken toys
With tears for us to mend,
I brought my broken dreams to God
Because He was my Friend.

But then instead of leaving Him
In peace to work alone.
I stayed around and tried to help
In ways that were my own.

At last I snatched them back and cried,
“How could You be so slow?”
“My child,” He said, “What could I do?
You never did let go!”