

"The Love of God"

If we could but grasp how greatly God loves us, it would change our lives. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders. This is a Bible study, "In SEARCH of the Lord's Way." No one loves you like the Lord Jesus. Stay with us while we explore God's love.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way. From start to finish the Bible is God's supreme story of love and redemption. The more we read the Bible, the more we can understand the heart of God, the God who created us and sustains our very existence. Though mankind can be hard to love, God has never faltered in wanting to bless those who seek His face and draw near. James 1:17 says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." We're truly grateful that you've joined us today; we want to be part of your life each week.

God hasn't hidden His love for us; God displayed it beyond dispute in the death of Jesus upon the cross. 1 John 4:8 to 10 says, "The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Though we were lost and unable to save ourselves by ourselves, God acted! Christ willingly died for our sins and washed us clean in His blood. And such love is truly beyond comprehension.

Jesus bore the cross to atone for our sins and open the door to a loving relationship with our Father in Heaven. The Lord loved us when we were weak and couldn't save ourselves. He helped us when we were ungodly and had little thought of Him. He died for us while we were sinners, who had offended Him. Christ loved our souls when we didn't deserve it, understand it, or appreciate it. Such amazing love!

Now if you want to study more about this topic, we offer the information on this program free. If you'd like a printed copy, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also stream this program on our website www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from Ephesians 3:14 to 19, and explore God's love for us.

Our reading today comes from Ephesians, chapter 3, verses 14 to 19, and contains one of the prayers of the apostle Paul. "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God." Oh what a wonderful prayer.

Let's pray together. "Heavenly Father help us to know the love of Christ, and the love that You have shown to us each day of our lives. Give us strength and help us in every way. In Jesus name, Amen."

The Old Testament uses a rich and amazing word to describe the love that God has for all of His people. The Bible says that God is abounding in this kind of love. Some versions call it "steadfast love," some "lovingkindness," and some simply "mercy."

Psalm 103, verses 8 to 14 says, "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust."

"Steadfast" love is the deepest and best love; it's the kind of true love that doesn't let go and doesn't fail. It's loyal, faithful, kind, and good. It's compassionate and merciful. This type of love is built upon a voluntary covenant, an everlasting commitment to those who are in His favor. Psalm 86, verse 15 says, "But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." Because the God of Heaven is kind and good, He's willing to pardon and forgive our sins, if we will remain faithful to Him.

When you consider all that Jesus gave up in bearing the cross to save us from sin, you can't doubt His love. If anything, the magnificent love of Jesus was stubborn, unyielding, and utterly unselfish. Jesus didn't merely give up something; He sacrificed Himself completely. On the cross the innocent Lord Jesus sacrificed everything. He kept silent and did nothing, while men slandered Him, falsely accused Him, condemned Him, and scourged Him, and mocked Him, and crucified Him. 1 Peter 2:22 to 24 says, that "He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he didn't revile in return; when he suffered, he didn't threaten, but He continued entrusting himself to him who judges righteously or justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed."

Jesus bore the punishment and death for our sins, sins that we should've borne the punishment personally, we should have borne it in our own body, but He personally bore it in his body. The Lord laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53 and verse 6). His suffering was not only physical, it was also spiritual. 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 21 says, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God." Now everything that Jesus did, He did out of an undeniable and pure love for us. Can you imagine what it must have been like for Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane to know that he would suffer scourging and crucifixion? According to Matthew 26 and verse 38 Jesus was greatly troubled and sorrowful, even to the point of death. Luke 22:44 says, "And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground."

Now they didn't simply bind Jesus, they nailed His hands and feet to a rugged cross and suspended Him in the most agonizing position. And they crucified Him. Oh, He prayed that the Father would forgive them. They mocked Him, insulted Him, and did their very worst to Him. And through all of this suffering, Jesus remained quiet; He uttered no threats. He didn't even revile them in return. He didn't call for the twelve legions of angels to wipe them out. No, the Lord's stubborn love lasted for six long hours on the cross. And no matter how ugly men were to Jesus, Jesus' steadfast love held Him to the cross. He loved us to the very end.

1 Timothy 2, verses 3 and 4 says, "This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Again, 2 Peter 3 and verse 9 says, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." God doesn't want anyone to be lost, but our heavenly Father grants us the freedom to choose Him or to choose sin. You can't make

someone love you by force. God wants us to know Him, to know the truth, and to love Him freely for Who He is. This means we must be free to choose Him or to reject Him. Now God loves everyone, but His blessing and grace are reserved for those who choose to love Him. We must freely and lovingly choose to believe in Him, to repent of our sins, and to follow Him.

Occasionally people speak of God's "unconditional love." Yes, I know that Jesus said in Matthew 5, verse 45 that God "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust." God is certainly good to all! Jesus didn't bear the cross just for us, because we were so good and deserved it. No, Jesus died for us because we were sinful and needed saving. And in that sense, He unconditionally took the initiative; but we cannot for that reason assume that to remain in God's love we can do whatever we wish. We can't assume that God's love for us will continue to bless us if we turn from Him.

The Lord's steadfast love, His covenant love of promise, has conditions. The Lord Jesus said in John 14:23 to 24, that "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. And whoever doesn't love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me." Now God promises His love and abiding presence to those who love Him and keep His words. A person who doesn't love God won't care about keeping God's words.

Now it's a fantasy to think that we can sin all we wish and still count on the grace of God. It's fantasy to think we can rebel against God and still be right with Him. It's fantasy to think we can remake God in our own image and still please Him. It's fantasy to think we can rewrite His commandments, ignore His holiness, corrupt His character, and forget His justice, but still count on His love.

Hebrews 10:26 to 31 says, "For if we go on sinning deliberately (willingly, willfully) after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay.' And again, 'The Lord will judge his people.' It's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." We must never take the love and grace of God for granted. It's too valuable to squander.

Now you might be thinking at this point, "Well Phil don't you remember what the Bible says? God is love." Yes, I know 1 John 4:8. But picking a passage out of the Bible and ignoring other verses that are just as inspired isn't accurately handling the word of truth. We shouldn't understand 1 John 4:8 without also consulting 1 John 1:5 to 7. These verses say: "This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."

As J. I. Packer said in his book, *Knowing God*, "the God who is love is first and foremost light, and sentimental ideas of his love as an indulgent, benevolent softness, divorced from moral standards and concerns, must therefore be ruled out from the start. God's love is holy love. The God whom Jesus made known is not a God who is indifferent to moral distinctions, but a God who loves righteousness and hates iniquity, a God whose ideal for his children is that they should 'be perfect. . . as your

heavenly Father is perfect' (Matthew 5 and verse 48). He will not take into his company any person, however orthodox in mind, who will not follow after holiness of life."

Hebrews 12, verse 14 says, "Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord." Some might wonder if God loves us, why would He insist on our living holy lives? Well some think that if God loved us, He wouldn't demand that we live by all those rules. But let's stop here and think. Is God trivial? Are His laws petty? No. God insists that His people live holy lives so as to protect us and give us peace. We should consider the righteous way of life that Jesus Christ commands as a precious gift, not a burden or something petty or trivial. God isn't being mean when He asks us to treat others kindly or to refrain from evil. And everyone benefits when we live good lives. God's goodness is one of the ways that He shows His love.

When we Christians sin against Him by breaking His commandments, He disciplines us with love. Godly discipline is not abuse; it's training given for our good. Proverbs 3:11 to 12 says, "My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights." The book of Hebrews explains in Hebrews 12, verses 10 to 11 that God "disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." God disciplines our sins that we may share His holiness and live with Him. He acts for the long-term, and the long term good, not simply for the moment.

Now our society despises discipline, thinking love leaves people alone to do anything they want. They believe speaking against any behavior is mean-spirited and judgmental. But God speaks against sin out of love not meanness. Remaining silent about sinful behaviors that ruin lives is far more cruel than simply warning someone. God speaks out against sin because He cares. He wants to bless us.

Why is this important? Because the Lord created you and me for more than what takes place in this life. God loves you and is interested in your life here on earth and in the hereafter. He wants you to live with Him forever in heaven. Along with Paul we pray "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God."

Let's pray together. "Oh Father, help us to trust in Your teaching, to follow Your ways, to love You with all our heart, and soul and mind and strength, and to do Your will. In Jesus name, Amen."

The Lord Jesus touched lives throughout His ministry. He healed the sick, the lepers, the blind, and the deaf. He raised the dead, walked on water, stilled the storm, and fed the multitudes. When men did their worst to Him, He prayed for their forgiveness. Peter described Jesus in Acts 10, verse 38 as One who "went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him." The Lord Jesus is still doing good in our lives and blessing us richly. He leads us out of bondage to sin so that we can become children of God and living in righteousness. He leads us out of distress into hope, out of doubt into faith, and out of apathy into love.

We need the love of God in our lives every day! The more we grasp how much He loves us, the more we'll determine to demonstrate that same kind of lasting, committed love. Knowing the love of God will make us better fathers and husbands, better mothers and wives, better citizens, better children, and better friends. God's love teaches us patience and kindness, compassion and forgiveness, and forbearance and loyalty. Love motivates us to be holy and faithful. It teaches us how to love the truth and live with integrity and virtue. We need God's love to become better people.

The love of God should make you want to become a Christian. And you become a Christian by placing your trust in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, turning away from sin, confessing Christ before others, and by being baptized into Christ. When you're baptized, the Lord washes away your sins and adds you to His family the church. Nothing you will do today is more important than becoming a Christian. Won't you become one today?

We hope we've stirred your heart to respond to God's love. If you want a free printed copy of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org.

Or you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now you can download these lessons or a newsletter online at our website: www.searchtv.org. There's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches in your area. You can watch SEARCH anytime on YouTube! Subscribe to our channel, "SearchTVMinistry." Now be sure to like the programs that you watch. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now don't worry, we're not asking for money. We're here to help you draw close to God.

Focus your heart on God by worshiping at church. Everyone needs a church family. And there's probably a church of Christ near you. If you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be glad to help you find one. Well, we'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.