

# Love Before All Other Loves

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Date: 27 November 2016

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[ 0 : 00 ] So we're thinking about the love of God. God is lots of things. He is all-powerful. He's all-knowing. He's omnipresent, so he's present everywhere.

He's all good in his character. He is just. But he's actually defined as love. One of the most famous statements in the Bible, it's by the Apostle John, 1 John 4, God is love.

It's a wonderful statement, God is love. It's wonderful when you think that the atheist believes that at the heart of the universe is energy, matter and energy, which is fundamentally impersonal.

In fact, all that people are, all that personality is, if there's no God, is just impersonal things that have become very complex. So we call them personal.

Whereas the Christian says that at the heart of the universe is a loving creator God, a personal loving creator God. But when we think about our God as love, I wonder what sort of things that makes us think.

[ 1 : 18 ] The problem is that we have so many examples of love in our world, it's only natural that we want to take what we've experienced of human love and transfer that onto God when we hear that he is love.

So where does that leave us? Well, listen to how the Apostle John defines love when he says God is love. Whoever does not love does not know God because God is love.

This is how God showed his love among us. He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

The writer David Wells says this. I thought this was really uncomfortably true. David Wells writes this. John's sentence defining love would have been completed quite differently in the West today. In this is love, many would say, that God is there for us when we need him. He is there for what we need from him. He is love in that he gives inward comfort and makes us feel better about ourselves.

[ 2 : 30 ] He is love in that he makes us happy, that he gives us a sense of fulfillment, that he gives us stuff, that he heals us. That he does everything to encourage us each and every day.

Now, doesn't that fit exactly with what our popular culture would tell us that love is? I was thinking of an example. This was, I heard this song again and again on holiday recently. This is a song called Give Me Your Love by Sigala.

Do you know this song? Here are some of the words from this song. It's a dance song. I may be selfish, but I'll take your pain. When you get weak, I'll make you strong again.

When all is lost, I will comfort you. So give me your love. I need it. Give me your heart. I'm bleeding. Give me your love. I need it. So do you see what's going on there? Love is about me meeting your needs and you meeting my needs.

So I'm hungry for your love because I have these needs that you will satisfy in me. And in return, I will give you strength and comfort. And human love, especially romantic love, when we think about how it's reflected in pop culture songs, it's inherently unstable.

[ 3 : 41 ] It's like a whirlwind that's kind of exhilarating and can go disastrously wrong. Taylor Swift has this song, Blank Space, where she says love is a game.

And when you listen to the game that she's describing, I mean, you know, obviously, if you know the song, she looks like a complete psycho, basically, in the video. But what she's saying is, this game is going to be really good and then it's going to go terribly wrong.

But the highs will be worth it, even though they'll be lost at the end. So she says, got a long list of ex-lovers. They'll tell you I'm insane because you know I love the players and you love the game.

So if we transfer some of our culture's understandings of love onto God, do you see how dangerous that could be in terms of knowing Him truly? So God is love, but what if He changes?

He loves me today, but what if, in a few years' time, He changes His mind about me? If I don't feel today that God is meeting my needs, does He really still love me?

[ 4 : 44 ] If God's love is like human love, what happens when I fail to please Him? Would He still love me? What happens if I, if I don't really feel that I love Him very strongly back?

does He still love me then? But before we stop to really think about how God's love is different to human love, we also have to think about how very different God is from us.

And when you think about that, it's a miracle that we can know anything about God at all. So that's the first thing we're going to meditate on tonight. What is God really like compared to us? That's the first question on your sheets.

to pause and remind ourselves that God is the uncreated creator and we are tiny. We are tiny creatures. And we're going to get that in our reading.

I've asked Ian Duncan to read for us. It's in Isaiah chapter 40. If you'd like to take up your Bibles. If you want to look along, it's in page 725.

[ 5 : 56 ] From verse 12 to 26. Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand or the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens?

Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance?

Who can fathom the spirit of the Lord or instruct the Lord as his counselor? Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him? And who taught him the right way?

Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding? Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket. They are regarded as dust on the scales.

He weighs the islands as though they were fine dust. Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires nor its animals enough for burnt offerings.

[ 6 : 58 ] Before him all the nations are as nothing. They are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing. With whom then will you compare God?

To what image will you liken him? As for an idol a metal worker casts it and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it.

A person too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot. They look for a skilled worker to set up an idol that will not topple. Do you not know?

Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? He sits enthroned above a circle of the earth and its people are like grasshoppers.

He stretches out the heavens like a canopy and spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.

[ 8 : 06 ] No sooner are they planted no sooner are they sown no sooner do they take root in the ground than he blows on them and they wither and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal? says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens. Who created all these?

He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name because of his great power and mighty strength not one of them is missing.

This is the word of the Lord. great verses just to think through the size the immensity of God and do you see how it works by looking at the universe?

Our universe is unthinkable vast. I mean we are what are we 30 people in a room together the city of Glasgow is enormous compared to us the world is enormous compared to us 7 billion people you can fit more than a million planets the size of our world into the space that the sun takes up and there are well over 100 billion stars in our galaxy the Milky Way and there are hundreds of billions of galaxies in the universe and God made all of that those pictures in Isaiah 40 he sits enthroned above the circle of the earth and its people are like grasshoppers he brings princes to naught he reduces the rulers of this world to nothing to whom will you compare me God says lift up your eyes and look to the heavens who created all these isn't it extraordinary that we would gather like this and presume that we could know God the God who's done all of that he's also spirit so he doesn't have a body that we could relate to in a physical way and he exists outside of space and time which we can't even begin to imagine what that's like to exist out of time so we're going to pause and think about that for a few minutes now it's humbling to remember how great

[ 10 : 35 ] God is how far beyond us God is and that if he didn't want to have anything to do with us we'd have nothing to complain about we have no right to know him so great is the distance between us and him we could never find him by ourselves that's often the quest of theology around the world not kind of Christian theology but theology the idea that we could look at the world around us or reason from what's in our head and take steps to work out what the creator is like it's completely hopeless the distance is too great between us and God so two questions on the screen pause to reflect on the expanse of the created universe and then on the transcendent greatness of its creator who sits above the circle of the earth and having spent a bit of time on that meditate on the fact that you look like a grasshopper to God and on the way in which he brings our greatest princes to nothing

I'll just give us a few minutes to think about that so we thought about what God is really like next question then how can we know him because incredibly we can know him the writer Herman Bavinck says this there is certainly no book in the world which to the same extent and in the same way as holy scripture supports the absolute transcendence of God above each and every creature and at the same time supports the intimate relationship between the creature and his creator how? because of Jesus because Jesus is fully God and so Jesus makes God known to us in Matthew chapter 11 Jesus says to the crowds all things have been committed to me by my father no one knows the father except the son no sorry no one knows the son except the father and no one knows the father except the son and those to whom the son chooses to reveal him now if Jesus had stopped there and gone home we might as well all go home and give up no hope of knowing God but then the very next thing that he said was this come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest Jesus offers to make God known to us and that gives us the rest that we were made for in John 14 9 he says whoever has seen me has seen the father he is fully God and by coming to him we see God truly it's astonishing that this is the way that God acted in history for until that time

God had made humanity he made Adam the first human being to live in an ideal relationship with God in fact probably Adam in the garden of Eden would have known God the father God the son and God the spirit intimately and Adam turned from God he disobeyed God and one of the results of that was that he was thrown out of the garden he was thrown out of paradise and relationship with God so God could have crumpled up the world and thrown it away at that point and we'd have had nothing to complain about and instead God's solution was to send his eternal son into our world to become a man to reveal God to us after we turned our back on knowing him so in that sense Jesus is the great prophet a prophet reveals God to us and that's what

Jesus does for us and we have to respond to that by honoring him and relying on him alone for the revelation of God we dishonor him when we think we can find out about God in different places rather than looking to him as our perfect revelation of God so when we do that when we come to God through Jesus what do we see that's my third question on the sheets what do we see well we see a God who has always existed a love before all other loves the first four words of the Bible in the beginning God he is there in eternity before there is anything else he is one there's one God Deuteronomy 6 4 hear O Israel the Lord our God the Lord is one but he is three persons and we see that at the baptism of Jesus Matthew chapter 3 as soon as Jesus was baptized he went up out of the water at that moment heaven was opened and he saw the spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him and a voice from heaven said this is my son whom I love with him

[ 15 : 45 ] I am well pleased three persons in the one God and these three divine persons exist in eternity in other persons centered love we've heard that the father declared there at Jesus baptism this is my son whom I love and in the upper room the night before Jesus died Jesus said this to his disciples I do as the father has commanded me so that the world may know that I love the father and when he prays for us in Gethsemane he says this to God in John 17 he said father I want those you have given me to be with me where I am and to see my glory the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world righteous father though the world does not know you I know you and they know that you have sent me I have made you known to them and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them so God the father loves the son he's always loved the son eternally and he sent the son into the world on a mission that would bring glory to the son and that saving work that we see in history is just a reflection of the eternal love within the Godhead father son and spirit now no other God could be like this

Allah the God of Islam is not like this he's fundamentally not like this in fact this is a major sticking point in the Muslim faith one of the qualities of God the attributes of God is that God isn't dependent on anything else by himself he fully is everything he is he doesn't need anything or anyone but Allah is completely on his own the God of Islam in the Quran it says this say he is God one God the everlasting refuge who has not begotten and has not been begotten and equal to him is not anyone now within the Muslim faith Allah is said to have 99 names and one of those names is the loving and it's not the word for being self-loving but that's an enormous problem in Islam because if that is one of the things that you can characterize

God as that he is loving he cannot be loving until he is created so he depends on his creation to be who he really is which contradicts something fundamental about the qualities of God that by himself he can be who he is he doesn't depend on anything now that problem is not true of the true God of the living God the God of the Bible sometimes it's called the dance of God that in eternity God the Father God the Son and God the Spirit have been revolving around each other exploding with delight and love for one another and it was that love for one another that overflowed in a desire to create humanity not because they needed us but because they desired to share their love and delight with us as creatures it's the love before all other loves so if you think about the Beatles song yesterday

I picked this song because I heard it's the most covered song of all time that it was covered in the 20th century 7 million times yesterday by the Beatles now a song like that that's been covered that many times you might compare different people's performance you might say well I like Wet Wet Wet's version of yesterday I think that's my favorite version someone else might say Frank Sinatra's version of yesterday was the best version but when you're doing that you're comparing it to a type that was already there whereas when we think about love God isn't like the Frank Sinatra or the Wet Wet Wet he is the Paul McCartney he's the one who designed it he's the one who wrote it you don't compare his love to a standard that's different to him he defines love in eternity and every other version of love can be compared or contrasted with that so our final question this evening what does that mean for us well three things

I think it means for us first of all here is a form of love that is always constant and reliable it's part of the unchanging reality of our universe and beyond our universe even at the cross when Jesus died even when he was laid in a tomb God the father and God the son and God the spirit didn't stop loving each other Jesus had died according to his human nature but Jesus in his divine nature was still part of the trinity sustaining the universe and loving his father and the spirit perfectly at that time and it will always be like that so there's no chance that tomorrow God will get the Monday morning blues and he'll feel a bit less loving towards his people he can't recreate himself and act outside his character like that he is perfect love forever and we can rely on that secondly related to that this means there is a form of love in the reality of everything that exists there is a form of love that could never disappoint you and that's really important for you to hear if you've been disappointed by love in the world your own experiences of human love might have been a terrible disappointment you might have experienced rejection divorce unrequited love the distance of a relative or parent who you longed to have love you if you have felt disappointed like that ever in any of those ways be comforted this evening lift up your eyes to the

[ 22 : 28 ] God who made you and fashioned you and see that the Father eternally delights in his Son and the Spirit the Spirit eternally delights in the Father and the Son the Son in his Father and the Spirit they love perfectly and this is who they will always be so where any of us has been damaged or disappointed by love it will never be like that when you're drawn into this relationship with the eternal God through the eternal Son so it's a form of love that's constant and unchanging it's a form of love that could never disappoint and lastly here is a God who is worthy of adoration again this writer Herman Bavinck said this the truth which at first we love especially because it gave us life thereupon becomes more and more dear to us because of itself because of what it reveals to us concerning the eternal being

Christian you see what he's saying there the usual pattern if you've become a Christian and you can remember a time when you weren't a Christian if you can't remember that then praise God but if you can then you will probably remember a time when you were drawn into knowing God because you heard of his love for you and the fact that his love was for you was a delight to you but when you come to see what God is like in eternity something different happens and you stop just loving the love of God for what it's done for you and you love it for what it is it's amazing it's wondrous that

God is love like this it's more rich and glorious than just what it does for us because it's this incredible reality in eternity and so that can be something to delight in as we look at God again a couple of questions on the screen we're there a couple of minutes to think about these have you idealized human relationships in what ways have you been disappointed by them think through the life of Jesus and find ways in which the persons of the Trinity reveal their love for each other how could you move from being grateful for God's benefits to adoration of his being I'll have a few minutes on that and then I'll lead us in the prayer on the sheets I'm going to say the prayer on the sheets it's from a book by Gary Williams his love endures forever I'll just say the prayer but I thought it might be helpful to have it written down just to follow it in your own mind and heart triune God father son and holy spirit may I learn who you are from what you have revealed of your eternal relations of love your triune love is eternal it precedes all other loves it fits no definition of love because it forms the definition of love it is untroubled undisturbed and eternally constant you will not one day decide not to be love because this is who you are your triune love is a flawless flourishing love

I praise you triune God of love for the prior perfection of your divine life God and father of the Lord Jesus Christ I praise you that you revealed your love for your son when you said this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased listen to him help me to listen to him because he is the one you love eternal son of God I praise you for your love for the father shown in your perfect obedience to him even unto death you have said that I must learn from your obedience that you love the father teach me this holy holy spirit of god i praise you that you are the bond of love between the father and the son that the son offered himself to the father and was raised through you i praise you that through the word you breathed i have come to know the son and through him the father lord god help me not to measure your love by human love but always to remember that your love is different from human love because it is the first love of all forgive me for the times when i have forgotten that and have tried to squash you into human boxes thank you that your acts reveal your being of love help me to prize you for who you are in Christ's name Amen