

OH, WHAT LOVE!
1 John 3:1-3

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

The California newspaper, The Press Enterprise, in the May 22, 2012 edition, reported that \$640,000 has been awarded by the John Templeton Foundation to the University of California to “study love.” Three philosophy professors have received the grant to answer the question, “What is love?” The university professor, Agnieszka Jaworska, who heads up the study, along with two colleagues, said “The team will hold a series of workshops and conferences and an essay contest, and hope to publish at least two books on the subject.” She went on to explain: “Our project will address such questions by capitalizing on the latest advances in neuroscience, and fostering interdisciplinary exchange between the best philosophical theories of love and caring, the relevant insights from psychology, law, medicine, and economics, and cutting edge scientific research on the emotions.”

Don’t wait until the professors master the subject and publish their findings to experience the love of God. God’s love for us is the perfect example and starting place to study love. When we read the verses in 1 John chapter 3 we are moved to exclaim, “Oh, what love!” Let us contemplate some of the reasons for such a glad response. Let us note:

THE EXCELLENT CHARACTER OF THIS LOVE

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.” (v.1)

“Behold” is an attention gripping word. The truth here articulated is so magnanimous, so wonderful and captivating that God caused the writer to call special attention to it. “Behold” is a signal that particular attention should be paid to what follows, not that the truth to which our attention is called is truer than any other truth.

This verse is an invitation to look upon, gaze at, stand in wonder of and comprehend the extraordinary quality of divine love. This word “behold” introduces a remarkable and unparalleled display of love. The Greeks had 3 major words for “love”: “phileo” - brotherly love; “eros” - sensual love and “agape” - the highest form of love, God-like love. It is the word “agape” that is word used in this passage. It is God-love, love without limits!

John was elated, excited and enthusiastic when he thought about God’s love for him and he used an attention-getting word—“Behold!” Today, we probably would say, Wow! Or, Look! Or, Don’t miss this! What about the love about which John writes demands our fullest attention? Let us “behold” this love as follows:

It Is Distinctive In Its Origin – “the Father...”

This is love born in the bosom of God the Father, borne to earth in the Person of the Son of His love and shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. (Romans 5:5) The Apostle Paul writes to the Ephesians about this divine love as follows: “And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge...” (Ephesians 3:17-19, NIV). He says that it is:

- Immeasurable—“how wide and long...”
- Unfathomable—“and high and deep...”
- Incomparable—“the love of Christ...”
- Incomprehensible—“love that surpasses knowledge...”

The Message expanded translation puts Ephesians 3:17-19 in modern English as follows: “With both feet planted firmly on love, you’ll be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of Christ’s love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God.”

His love exceeds by far our knowledge of it. Now we only know in part but what we know of the love of God, “is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell, it goes beyond the highest star and reaches to the lowest hell!”

It Is Divine In Its Outpouring – *“bestowed upon us that we should be called children of God!”*

God reached out to us and loved us because He desired to do so. His love has been freely bestowed upon us, no strings attached! We did not merit God’s love. John wrote in chapter four: *“We love him because he first loved us.”* (v. 19) Paul said that: *“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...”* (Ephesians 2:4-5).

There was not any goodness in us that caught God’s attention and caused Him to favor us. Grace is unmerited favor extended to undeserving sinners and since we were saved by grace we were saved not having any pre-salvation causes for God’s favor. God’s love has been bestowed, given, and poured out solely because of His divine prerogative to do so.

It Is Divisive In Its Outworking - *“Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.”*

Heavenly love is counter-cultural. The world of unregenerate mankind does not understand the committed Christian’s focus, motivation and lifestyle. Brotherly love is not understood or appreciated by a sinful populace programmed to “look out for number one.” Jesus warned about the animosity that would be evidenced by the world of unregenerate mankind when He said, *“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they*

kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me" (John 15:18-21).

Society in general wants to press everyone into the mold of "sameness." If one's life is holy and he lives counter to the downward flow of doomed citizenry, there is animosity, hatred and persecution. Why? As Jesus said, *"If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."*

We cannot be like Jesus Christ and expect the world of the unsaved to accept us with open arms. To be the friend of Christ is to become the enemy of the world. Conversely, *"Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?"* (James 4:4) The powerful quality of divine love is, by its nature, foreign to this world and because it is it causes divisions.

THE ELEVATING CONSEQUENCES OF THIS LOVE

"Beloved, now we are children of God..." – v. 2

This love reaches us in the deepest depths and raises us to the highest heights. The short phrase, "Beloved, now we are children of God", reveals several consequences of this divine love. Here we see:

A Precious Salutation – "Beloved"

"Beloved" means that we are "being loved"! It is an endearing term seldom used in our day but it needs to be revived and spoken by we who are sisters and brothers in the Father's family. This term tells us that we are dear to God.

A Present Salvation – "now..."

Our soul's salvation is a "now" reality. We do not have to wait until some future date to be the recipients of God's "so great salvation." If salvation were not by grace, but the result of our good deeds, we would never know when we had done enough to earn it. Therefore, it could not be a present reality. But because it is by the grace of God it becomes ours the moment we are born again. Therefore, we "now", already, presently are actually children of God!

A Permanent Standing – "...we are children of God..."

Having been born into God's family we are permanently His children. There is no such language or experience as being "unborn." Our relationship to God is furthermore permanently encapsulated in the truth that we are "joint heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17) and as such we have the assurance that we shall never be disinherited!

"Behold, what love the Father showed
When upon sinners that love bestowed;
Now to be declared the children of God
While yet living upon this earthly sod!"

THE EVENTUAL CHANGES BECAUSE OF THIS LOVE – v. 2b-3

“...and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

God’s love never changes its nature, but it changes our natures! Because we are the recipients of God’s life-changing love, our lives are changed for time and eternity in several ways. Consider:

The Honor That it Promises - *“...it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him...”*

There is enough revealed in scripture concerning our future state that lets us know that it will be infinitely better than this present state. However, it has not been fully revealed what we shall be nor does it need to be fully revealed to us. Our heavenly Father is too good to be unkind and too wise to make mistakes and we who have trusted Him without seeing Him are content to trust Him for what is yet to be! Just to know that *“we shall be like Him”* is more than what once doomed sinners deserve! What an honor to *“be like him”*!

The Hope That it Provides - *“...for we shall see Him as He is.”*

Do you think much about actually seeing Jesus with your own two eyes? Jesus, about Whom we have read so many wonderful things in the New Testament? Jesus, the only perfect One to ever step on this earth? Jesus, the one Who hung on that old rugged cross? Jesus, Who arose from the dead, ascended and is now seated at the right-hand of the throne in heaven? Jesus, Who appeared to John on the isle of Patmos and at Whose feet he fell in worship?

We shall see Him! What a prospect—what hope! Are you looking for Him to come? Paul said, “There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8). I want to qualify for the “crown of righteousness” by looking for and loving His appearance—at any moment!

The Holiness That it Produces - *“And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”*

There is a test here: if we say that we have and are motivated by the “blessed hope” (*“looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ”* Titus 2:13), the questions arise, “Are we more holy because of our hope?” and “Does that hope have a purifying effect upon our lives?”

There are two types of “purification” in the New Testament:

- There is purification from our original sinful state – Jesus Christ, “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people...” (Titus 2:14).
- The other is self-purification—*“everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself.”*

One is the Savior's purification of us, the other is self-purification—that is, we are to keep ourselves pure. Paul wrote to Timothy to *"keep thyself pure"* (1 Timothy 5:22). I hear much about the Savior's purifying work on Calvary, but little about self-purification. If the truth of the hope of the imminent return of Jesus Christ is truly believed and received it will result in holiness of life.

The blessed hope and holiness go together! In other words, if belief does not issue in behavior commensurate with professed belief, it is not true belief. If we are in the Father's family, we possess the Father's nature. He is holy and, *"as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy"* (1 Peter 1:15-16).

Illust. A group of teenagers were enjoying a party, and someone suggested they go to a certain disreputable place for more fun. One young lady said to her date, "I'd rather you took me home. My parents don't approve of that place." One of the girls sarcastically asked, "What? Afraid your father will hurt you?" She replied, "No, I'm not afraid my father will hurt me, but I am afraid I might hurt him." She understood the principle that a true child of God, who has experienced the love of God, has no desire to sin against that love.

Conclusion

As children of the loving heavenly Father we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength (Deuteronomy 6:5). If we value His love for us we should also love those whom God has loved. The children of God should be great lovers!

"Oh, what love that He should die for me!

Saving grace thus to supply for me;

Oh, what love! Oh, what love!

Evermore I'll sing it - Oh, what love!"

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