

JUNE 14, 2020

LESSON 2

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD

GOD IS LOVE (1 JOHN 4:8)

We use the word “love” to describe a wide range of ideas. For example, you can say to your spouse, “I love you” or “I love chocolate ice cream.” Hopefully, these qualities of love differ significantly!

God’s Love for Humanity

Why did God create the universe? Because of his love for humanity. When God created Adam and Eve, his primary motivation was love. He gave them a magnificent world that was “very good” (Gen 1:31), perfect in every way. He placed them in a beautiful garden, the Garden of Eden, and provided them with marvelous fruits to eat.

The creation account in Genesis 1 starkly contrasts with the ancient myths swirling around as Mesopotamian creation stories. These taught that humans were created in order to serve as slaves to the gods.¹ Genesis 1 instead presents humanity as the culmination of God’s glorious creation, rather than an afterthought—or worse.

What God our Father wanted more than anything was a precious relationship with humanity. Unfortunately, sin got in the way. But right after Adam and Eve sinned, God revealed his plan to remedy the malady: Jesus our Lord (see Gen 3:15). God sent his beloved Son to die for the sins of humanity (John 3:16).

“God Is Love”

Our Father in heaven doesn’t simply love us. He is love. According to 1 John 4:8, “God is love.” This means that love is an integral part of his character. Everything he does is motivated by love. This includes his act of creating us and providing a sacrifice for our sins. We didn’t deserve Jesus’ sacrifice on our behalf. He was sinlessly perfect, but he died for all humanity and thus restored our relationship with God.

In order to maintain our relationship with him, we must be holy and sinlessly perfect (cf. Heb 12:14). And sin, because we let it back into our lives, prevents us from doing just that! Thankfully, we can always access the blood of Jesus, and, through our repentance and faithful obedience, we can “abide in his love” (John 15:9–10).

¹ E. C. Lucas, “Cosmology,” *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 136.

The Love of God

Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made;
Were ev’ry stalk on earth a quill,
And ev’ry man a scribe by trade;

To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Tho’ stretched from sky to sky.

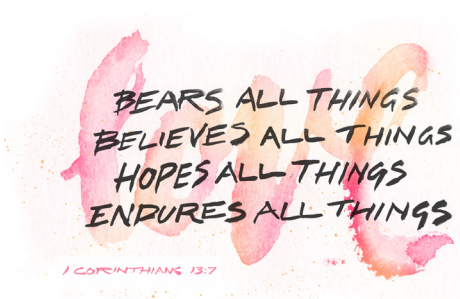
—F. M. Lehman

Love the World, Or Not?

“For **God so loved the world**, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

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 (1 John 2:15).

How do you reconcile these two passages, which seem contradictory?



“Love One Another”

God created us in his image (Gen 1:26), which means we were made to love. This quality must be an integral part of who we are. This helps explain why parents have unconditional love for their children. When we act this way toward our offspring, we are simply imitating our Heavenly Father who loves us so much that he allowed Jesus to die for us. Here are some ways we can imitate God’s love.

Love Means God Comes First

The greatest commandment says we must love God more than anything else (Deut 6:4–5; cf. Matt 22:36–37). Jesus once asked Peter, “Do you love me more than these?” (John 21:15). He was asked this question because he had recently denied Jesus. By confessing his love, Peter was able to restore his relationship with his friend, Jesus.

Love Means We Are Forgiving

We don’t always get along with people. But we should still love them. In fact, it’s commanded! Jesus said, “Love your enemies” (Matt 5:44). He went on to explain that, by doing this, we are simply imitating our Father in heaven. As children of God, we must love those whom we deem unlovable. After all, that’s what God did for us (Eph 2:4–5).

Love Means Church Families Care For Each Other

The great chapter on love—1 Corinthians 13—is often read at wedding ceremonies. And while this is certainly appropriate, we need to remember the original context: the church family. Chapter 13 is nestled between two chapters discussing the regulation of spiritual gifts. People were filled with pride over their ability to speak in tongues, while others couldn’t. This church family was dysfunctional!

As he began his poetic description of love, Paul said, “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor 13:1). Afterwards, he begins to describe love in the beautiful way he does (read 1 Cor 13:4–8a). Remember also Paul’s statement about our concern for others:

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and *especially to those who are of the household of faith* (Gal 6:10, emphasis added).

Love Must Reign Supreme in the Home

Husbands and wives are commanded to love one another (Eph 5:25; Titus 2:4). Sometimes, though, we use our family as punching bags, letting off steam when we can’t vent our frustrations on those we are really angry with (like a boss or coworker). But these selfish acts take their toll on a relationship. As with everything else, our children learn about love at home from Mom and Dad. “Where love is in the home, there’s happiness.”