

HIS GREAT LOVE by Dave Rogers

Twice in 1 John 4 the “apostle of love” unequivocally states that “God is love” (verses 8, 16). In 1 John 4:7, love is “of” (literally, out of) God – it finds its origin in Him. The very concept of love is an absolute attribute of His being. John’s words describe God’s essential character in terms of His actions – it is consistent with His nature and person to BE loving – and reveal what is (and is not) “love” by measuring all human thoughts, motives and actions against Him. The totality of that love is expressed in Jesus’ words to Nicodemus; “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). First John 4:19 shows why He endowed Christians with the blessing of sonship; “He first loved us.” God’s love is illustrated in the fact that He “commends” it (brings it near, makes it accessible to us) by offering the Christ in our stead “while we were yet sinners” (Rom. 5:8).

The God described within the sacred page is not a dispassionate, uninterested observer but an active participant in the whole of human history; thus it is no accident that nearly every New Testament reference to His love for humanity uses the word *agape* – love that seeks another’s welfare ahead of one’s own.

Malachi 3:6 offers one of the bible’s most profound statements related to God’s love for us – “I am the Lord, I do not change....” In context, ancient Judah’s continued existence was not due to any “worthiness” on their part, but to God’s patient and gracious love for them, an attestation of the fact that His character does not change over time; He is always utterly consistent and perfectly reliable. This is why we can rely on His love for US at all times; as He promised Moses and Joshua in Deuteronomy 31:6 and 8, and Joshua 1:5, “I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.”

BECAUSE He loves us, God rejoices when we choose the right way (e.g., Zeph. 3:13-17). Romans 8:38-39 declares, “...neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” No wonder, then, that Paul writes of the unfailing quality of love in 1 Corinthians 13!

However, God’s love does not blind Him to our sins. The Psalmist vividly describes His great wrath when the Israelites repeatedly showed their ingratitude in the wilderness by chronic complaining, greed, mistrust, and idolatry at Sinai (Ps. 78). Yet He also felt compassion for them (verse 38), sparing them when He would have been fully justified to destroy them. God’s wrath still abides on one who refuses to believe in Him (John 3:36), and Romans 1:18 reminds us that...“the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness....” Nevertheless, His pity (compassion) for His people has the wonderful effect of tempering the justice we deserve because He remembers that we are His children (Ps. 103:8-13). His restraint is further proof of His love for us.

God is the Source of love in our lives (the origin, 2 Cor. 13:11; 14): Therefore our own ability to love and feel loved does not originate within ourselves; it comes from HIM. His mercy is an outgrowth of that love (Eph. 2:4), and He teaches us to love one another (1 Thess. 4:9) so that WE too might learn to be merciful (cf. Matt. 5:7).

Because we are made in His image (Gen. 1:26), we are supposed to be “like” Him; our love is to be modeled on His because He is our archetype. OUR love is an informed, deliberate choice (Titus 2:4) rooted in the fact that “We love, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). In the same way that our existence implies a great Designer, so our ability to love implies a greater Mind and Heart, and greater Love and Compassion than exists among men alone. How will we respond to the love He offers today?