

“The Love of God as a First Cause”

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Read 1 John 4:10, 17-21

In the absence of who God is, we would love no one and nothing other than ourselves. It is the love of God that sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. The whole redemptive activity of God is sourced in who God is, not in who man is or has done.

We have a tendency to believe that we are the end and the means. We are delusional as to what position we hold in the created order. Although we are the pinnacle of all things created, we are still created. There is only one Creator and we are not Him. We struggle when we think that God’s love for us is unconditional and thus unmerited. We want to believe that somehow God’s love for us is inescapable. Because of who we are, He had no other choice. This is, fortunately, not true. I say “fortunately” because if the love of God was something to be merited, then it would always be unattainable. We are never capable of measuring up to the standard established by God. God’s love for us is a first cause. In the absence of His love for us, life would be at a complete standstill.

John is often cited as the one who celebrates the love of God. Inside of 1 John he accents multiple dimensions of God’s love. One of the primary and foundational ideas within 1 John is that God loves us first. The love of God is a first cause. God is the one who causes all things, but He Himself is uncaused. John gives us three consequences of this first cause activity.

First, the love of God is the cause behind Him sending His Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10). It is the love of God that moves Him to placate His own wrath against us. There is nothing outside of God that moves Him to love us. His love forms for us a first cause. Such thinking as this is unexplainable. It exceeds our ability to comprehend. God offered up His own Son as a vicarious sacrifice for those who stood in a position of rebellion against Him. The Son of God voluntarily took upon Himself a human nature and then surrendered Himself up as the vicarious sacrifice. He submitted Himself to an ultimate humiliation at the hands of those He created.

As sinners who rejected God, we became objects of His wrath, a wrath that would be fully justifiable in its demonstration against sinners. The complete expression of this wrath would be an eternal separation from God and all that results as a benefit of His presence, played out in a lake of fire where a perpetual state of agony and torment exists.

The only means for this wrath to be negated through satisfaction is in God becoming man and dying in their place as race representative. As far fetched as this sounds, it happened. The motivating factor prompting God to act as He did is His gracious justifying love.

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Second, the love of God is the cause that creates a platform for confidence in the day of judgment (1 John 4:17, 18). Because the perfect love of God abides within us, we can have confidence in the future day of judgment when and where everyone and everything will give an account of their lives. The perfect love of God is the imputed righteousness of Christ placed into the account of the redeemed. Because we have the imputed righteousness of Christ placed upon us, the Father sees us as righteous as His Son and thus we have no fear of punishment. If we fear, it is because we do not understand our present union with Christ and what this means in relation to the Father and future judgment.

It is the love of God that creates for us a friendly context in which He receives us before Himself. His love moves Him to impute to our account the righteousness of Christ. It is this imputation of Christ's righteousness that removes from us fear and replaces it with confidence.

It is the love of God that allows me no longer to fear His wrath and thus punishment. It is the perfect love of God in me that removes from me a fear of future (or even immediate) punishment.

We have lived so long in bondage that it is a work of grace to live in freedom. Love and fear are mutually exclusive concepts. My fear of God does not negate my love for God. My fear of God is one of a creature before their Creator, a son before their Father, and a redeemed slave before their redeeming Liberator. In none of these relationships is there a fear of punishment, only of adoration.

Finally, the love of God forms the only reasons as to why I love at all (1 John 4:19-21). It is the love of God as a first cause that enables me to love anyone and anything. In the absence of God's love, I would not be capable of loving anyone or anything.

Any expression I have for others or seen in others is a constant confirmation of God's love. If God did not initiate loving, then no one anywhere at anytime would love. We would have been consumed by our own self-serving desires and constant exploitation of others.

If this is true, then how should we now live?

First, knowing that the reason behind God sending His Son to be a propitiating sacrifice lays solely in God, we should be deeply humbled and eternally grateful. Everything we have we received as a gift from God. There is nothing we possess that we earned independent of His gracious love.

Second, we should stop living in the fear of future judgment and start living in the freedom of a perfect love. When we fear future punishment we are negating the power of His redemptive work in the canceling of sin.

Finally, every act and expression of love is a picture of who God is and what He has done. We need to see the love of God in the mundane and routine and in the details and fragmented pieces of life. We need to start seeing and hearing and feeling this love and we need to ask God to be this in us and through us to those around us.