

# The love of God for all his creatures

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[ 0 : 00 ] So the thought is that we look at the subject, the deep and rich but not necessarily simple topic of the love of God.

! So on the church timetable we're going to think of the love of God for all his creatures, the love of God in the gospel, the love of God from eternity and walking in the love of God.

So we're going to look at it in four sections. So this evening the thought is to look quite generally at the love of God in terms of, really in terms of creation.

And I'd like to pick out some points on the landscape of this rather large subject. My target is this thought of Christians saying to people, God loves you, notice the full stop, because I'm not really sure that this is a helpful thing to say just in that way.

So all sorts of people might hear this. And I think we sort of owe it to them to be a little bit clearer than just say, God loves you, full stop.

[ 1 : 24 ] I think there's more to it than that. So all sorts of people might have all sorts of responses. What I wouldn't like somebody to think is, well, I didn't realize that.

I'm greatly heartened and lifted up in my life. And I'll carry on just the way I was. You see what I mean? If you say to somebody, God loves you, they say, oh, well, that's nice.

It's not quite the same thing as the gospel, because the gospel calls people to turn to God and to change, doesn't it? It would be an awful thing if the person hearing that God loves them said, well, actually, I'm not too surprised.

Because I see his point. I'm a pretty smart sort of person. Because that would be completely the wrong take on the love of God. So that was my target. That was the thing that sort of got under my skin.

And I thought we need to think about this. But I'm not particularly going to go there today. I thought we'd have some general thoughts about love, particularly about love in the Bible.

[ 2 : 39 ] So I'm going a little wider than the advertised brief. So we're going to look some verses up. That's really what we're going to do. So let's look at 1 John 4, verse 8.

1 John 4.

1 John 4, verse 8. 1 John 4, verse 8. 1 John 4, verse 8.

1 John 4, verse 8. 1 John 4. 1 John 4. 1 John 4. 1 John 4. love. That's quite a strong statement, isn't it? God is love. 1 John 4 verse 8. God is love. That seems to say that the quality, attribute of love is so much part of who God is that in a way every action that he has must, so it seems, reflect something of this.

That's the sort of thought that it makes me think of. God is love. So hold that thought and we'll carry on. Matthew 22 verses 34 to 40. Matthew 22.

[ 4 : 25 ] Matthew 22, 34 to 40. Brenda, please could you read those verses to us? Mary.

Thank you very much.

So there's another big statement. That's Jesus being asked in a way to summarise the whole of the Old Testament. Or certainly the whole of the law part of the Old Testament.

And he says, you can summarise it in these two sentences. Love for God and love for your neighbour.

That's the whole thing. All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments. I think he's saying that this is such a fundamental thought.

[ 5 : 47 ] You could sort of boil down the whole of the Old Testament and this is what you would come up with. The whole thing rests on that idea about loving God and loving your neighbour.

So I think that again is a big text that covers lots of stuff. It doesn't say everything but at least it shows us that it's a big topic. Well the next thing that I've wanted to do before we look at some more

texts.

Is just to think about the idea of love. I don't think love means just one thing. I think it covers quite an area.

So here I've put some of the things that I think love is to do with. So I think it can be a love of delight.

So something that you really enjoy. It could be a person. I guess it could be a thing. You say I love that because I delight in it.

[ 6 : 53 ] I think love would include benevolence. So that's good wishes towards somebody. So to love your neighbour.

You might not think your neighbour is totally delightfully wonderful. Your neighbour might be a street drinker if you happen to be walking that way.

But you're still commanded to love our neighbour. So I think benevolence, wishing good, at least comes under the heading of love.

I think there's some sorts of love. There's some sorts of love which are very much akin to obedience. Perhaps I can substantiate that by some text in a moment.

And there are some sorts of love that I think come very close to compassion. Now if you think about it, all these things are slightly different, aren't they? They're not exactly the same.

[ 7 : 56 ] Don't look convinced, so I'll have a go at this. Think on this side of the paper, on this side of the screen rather, of the different sorts of ways you could love, so your sibling, your brother.

If you had a brother, how you might love your brother. And then think of the way a husband and a wife might love one another.

It's not exactly the same, is it? For one thing, there is a sexual component to the love between wife and husband, which would be completely improper in any of these other relationships.

Think of the way you would treat a child that you loved. That would be another sort of love.

In the Bible, we're to love the king. Or the king gets... I think that again is a different sort of love. It has different activities.

[ 8 : 59 ] Or think of loving your neighbour. You wouldn't... If you loved your neighbour, you wouldn't treat your neighbour exactly as you might your husband or wife. So if a wife is to love her husband, she wouldn't treat all her neighbours in exactly the same way.

She'd get into a lot of trouble, wouldn't she? Love the Lord. This is what we're commanded to do. What does that look like, loving the Lord?

You could say, I love Indian food. You might say, I love Indian food. But that would be... That would be a fair use of the word. But it would mean something different to, I love my baby, wouldn't it?

You wouldn't eat your baby, would you? You might say, I love foreign travel. Some people love foreign travel.

But that would be a different thing, shall we say, to loving the Lord. And in the Bible, it talks about loving your enemy.

[ 10 : 05 ] Now then, that's a very different thing, isn't it? So, I'm just trying to show the size of the map that we need to have in our minds when we're thinking about love.

It's really quite a big map. And here are some texts, and we'll go through the texts, and that's really what I want us to do this evening, just to sort of map things out. So, here we go.

Proverbs 17, 17. I'm sorry to say, these are in no particular logical order. Well, I take that back slightly.

I did try to match them with the things in black, but I didn't succeed in all cases. So, Proverbs 17, 17.

Steve, could you read that one for us, please? A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. Thank you very much. I think there's a parallel between those.

[ 11 : 08 ] What the friend does and what the brother does. A friend and a brother are put in the same sort of bracket here, I think. A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

Seems to be saying that if you're in trouble, you know, your washing machine's broken down and is sprayed water all over everywhere, and somebody will come and help you mop it up, even in the middle of the night, or somebody will help you do your washing, or something like that.

That is what a brother might do, or in the parallel part of it, a friend who loves you would do that sort of thing.

Does that make sense? Just notice what's being said about love here. It's not to do with going weak at the knees. It's to do with being practical help.

Something like that, isn't it? That's what love is in this context. Let's look at another one. Genesis 29, 18 to 20. Genesis 29, 18 to 20.

[12:34] Genesis 29, 18 to 20. Genesis 30, 18 to 20. 20. 20. 20. Please could you read that to us?

Yes. Next to...

Yes. Thank you.

How would you characterize that love? Would anybody like to suggest any other ways of describing that? Sorry?

Apparently, yes. It seemed like only a few days because of his love for her. There might have been a bit weak at the knees sort of love there.

[13:46] Although, there's a lot of ears to be weak at the knees, isn't it? So, romantic love. I think there's a romantic love here. A sense of delighting in the other person.

Not just being helpful. I think it's saying more than this. There's a sort of delight and a sense of being drawn out towards that person in longing, in affection, in appreciation, in a desire to be close. That sort of thing in this particular love. So, I've put that next to wife-husband. I think it's that sort of thing. Is that fair enough? 2 Samuel 18.33 2 Samuel 18.33 This is upon the death of Absalom. And this is King David. It doesn't use the word love. 2 Kings 18.33. Ray, please, could you read this for us? The king was shaken.

He went up to the room and gave where he went. As he went, he said, Oh, my son, my son, my son, my son, my son, my son, my son, my son, my son.

[15:27] Thank you very much. Now, it doesn't say in that verse. Now, it doesn't say in that verse that David loved Absalom. And I'm not sure whether it says it further on.

It does say you love those who hate you and you hate those who love you. But I think it is a description of love. Don't you? Is there any other word that we could use to say what David felt about Absalom?

It's one of the rare times that David expresses himself with such depth, such pathos.

Notice these repetitions. Oh, my son, my son, my son, Absalom, Absalom, Absalom, my son, my son. It's really quite heart-rending. So, I would, personally, I would say this is an expression of love. The word isn't used, but that's the only description, that's the only word I can think of to put it under. The love, the father's love for his son.

[16:37] The love for a child there. 1 Samuel 18, 16. 1 Samuel 18, 16.

This is about David. This is about King David. Julie, please, could you read us 1 Samuel 18, 16.

Thank you.

So, this is King David. And it says, All Israel and Judah loved David. It is said of David that various people loved him. I think he was the sort of character that captured people's imagination and captured people's hearts.

But let's just think about this word love here. I don't think it means that everybody, male and female, in Judah thought he was a really gorgeous guy.

I don't think it was that sort of love. I don't think it was. I think it's more that people felt, this is a chap I could follow.

[17:55] This is, this is, he's a great leader. I'm willing to get behind this person. I'm willing to put myself out for David. I'm willing even to put my life on the line.

If he's the king, he goes into battle. I'm right there behind him. Now, Lindsay looks puzzled at that.

Do you think that's, or was that your thinking face? No, no, it was my, my, my, my, my.

Yeah, yeah, right, okay. It wasn't your, oh, no, no, no, no, no. Yeah. Yeah, so I think there's a sort of love here which is different, again.

It's a different aspect, isn't it? It's a different colour of love, different flavour of love. So, love towards the king. It's a bit more akin to loyalty, do you think?

A little bit more akin to getting in towards obedience, isn't it? If you love the king, you do what he says. So, is that fair?

[18:53] Is that fair, loving the king? Yes. I don't know, do you think it's possible because there's also a sort of similar critique about it? Like, why are you so cool? Missed the last bit. Sort of thinking about, oh, wow, you're so cool.

Yeah. Yeah. I think there is a sort of celebrity love. I think he was that sort of person.

But you don't find the fickleness of it here because they do actually follow him into battle. And in the bit with Absalom, they've just come back from battle.

And they love him. And they have gone out and said, we're willing to put our lives on the line for the king. And that's, so, yeah, I think there was a celebrity status to David.

But there's a bit more to it. Yeah. Okay. Let's look at, where did we get to? Leviticus 19, Leviticus 19, 18.

[19:59] This, I believe, is the bit that Jesus was quoting from, Leviticus 19, 18.

Ernest, have you got the place there, Leviticus 19, 18? Could you read it to us, please? Yes. Thank you.

Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people. But love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord. So interesting the way that that command is linked in its expression.

The fact that the Lord is the Lord. To the fact that the opposite of love would be being mean.

Bearing a grudge. Seeking revenge.

Interesting, it's also linked with our view of ourselves. Love your neighbor as yourself. Be as protective and concerned for your neighbor as you would be for yourself.

[21:18] I think that's what it's saying. So there, again, is a different sort of love. That's what it says. Very important love. The way we love our neighbor. Any comments on that?

Okay. Let's look at Deuteronomy 6, 5 to 7. Assuming I've got the right verse.

Yes. Deuteronomy 6. Well, let's begin with verse 4. Let's go 4 to 7. So, Martin, please could you read Deuteronomy 6, 4 to 7.

Thank you.

Thank you very much. So, here's this very fundamental Old Testament duty.

[22:48] Love the Lord your God with everything that you have. With your heart. And with your soul. And with your strength.

And when Jesus quotes it, I believe in order to bring out the full dimensions of it, he says, with your mind, doesn't he, as well. So, everything, every component of human makeup is meant to be inclined towards God in love.

Love the Lord your God. What a wonderful, wholesome thing that is. It would be great if we could do that, wouldn't it?

To love the Lord in that full sort of way. How wonderful. Let's look at Proverbs 11, verse 1.

Proverbs 11, verse 1.

[23:55] It doesn't use the word love. Proverbs 11, verse 1. I think it could legitimately come under that sort of heading.

Chris, please, could you read us Proverbs 11, verse 1. The Lord of course is on his scales, but actually makes our best delight. Hmm.

Which is a rather wonderful text, isn't it? I think it shows us the word delight doesn't always mean total ecstatic enthusiasm.

It could mean that. It doesn't always have to go that far down the spectrum. I think it's saying that God looks with pleasure, with favor, on honest trade. Dishonest scales, where you have one set of scales for weighing it when you're paying for it, and another set of scales when you're getting somebody else to pay you for it.

That's what he's saying is abhorrent. But accurate weights for honest trade, the Lord looks on with pleasure.

[25:01] That's good. Yeah? Whether we would say the Lord loves honest weights, doesn't actually use the word love, but it's in that territory, isn't it?

Now there's one that I missed out, which was Psalm 145. Now let's see whether I can find the text, because I... Yeah, it's Psalm 145, verse 9.

Why don't we take Psalm 145, 8 and 9. Psalm 145, 8 and 9.

And I've forgotten how far we've got. Have we got to Lindsay? Yes, we have. Psalm 145, 8 and 9, please. Thank you.

It was the bit about, in verse 9, about all his works. So you have tender mercy over all his works.

[26:09] And his tender mercies are over all his works. Thank you very much. And NIV, as he has compassion on all he has made. Doesn't use the word love in that verse, but I think we're in that territory.

And it's saying that the Lord sees all the works he's made. The trees, the squirrels, the bunny rabbits, the lions, the mountain streams.

And his attitude to all these things is compassion. His tender mercy. That's what Psalm 104 is getting at, isn't it?

It's saying that the whole world is full of the sort of bubbling through of God's love. Of God's care. That this world that we live in, and particularly this bit of it, is not a harsh, random, impersonal, purposeless, faceless, meaningless conglomeration of random atoms.

It's saying that this world is... Just behind this world is a God who is giving things.

[ 27 : 42 ] And a God who is doing things. And this world is sort of radiant with his care. And sparkles with his goodness. And wherever you look, there's evidence of his benevolence.

And his fruitful making. I'm told that if you think of viruses, which are the most sort of primitive thing that you could call life.

And sometimes you even wonder whether they are alive. But the world is absolutely full of them.

And the oceans are full of them. And there isn't a space where you could have something that is alive, that's empty.

The whole place is just teeming with life and activity. And the Psalm is saying that's because God fills the world with his goodness and care.

That's what we got in Psalm 104, wasn't it? That there's places for rabbits. Presumably that's what Coney is, is it? Maybe it isn't. There's places for goats.

[ 28 : 47 ] God makes places for goats. God makes sure that the trees get watered. God makes grass grow for the cattle. And the lions, he feeds them. And he feeds them regularly.

And the oceans are full of fishes and big fishes and huge whales and sorts of things like that. And the place is just crammed full of life.

And this is because the Lord is good to all. And the Lord has compassion on all he has made. You see that sort of picture? Whether you technically say it's the love of God, but it's something like that, isn't it?

Does that make sense? Let's look at Deuteronomy 10.19. Deuteronomy 10.19.

Dave. Dave. Dave. And do you want to love those who are aliens? Do you, yourselves, are aliens and not aliens?

[ 30 : 06 ] Okay. It's not about E.T. Or Cybermen. Not those sort of aliens. Or Daleks. But the stranger. The asylum seeker.

The person who's a stranger in a foreign land and can't speak your language. It's yet another sort of love, isn't it? It's yet another sort of love, isn't it? Of kindness.

Of not making fun of somebody when you could make fun of them. Not, you know, realizing that you need to help them in a particular way.

That sort of thing. To love those who are aliens. To love those who are aliens. And Jesus takes it further in Matthew 5.43-48.

Matthew 5.43-48.

[ 31 : 10 ] And as we read this, or as Catherine reads it, does this, what does this say about God's love?

It doesn't mention God's love as such. Does it imply anything about God's love? Matthew 5.43-48. Matthew 5.43-48.

Thank you very much. Okay, Jesus is taking God's behavior as the model, isn't he? Think of the way God acts towards all sorts of people.

And then put this into your behavior. So you are not to love your neighbor and hate your enemy. You are not only to love those who love you.

But to love even people who are obnoxious to you. People who are ungrateful to you. People who might even persecute you.

[ 32 : 42 ] Love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you. So that you might be like God.

It doesn't say God loves his enemies. But it implies that, doesn't it? If we are to love our enemies. To be like the Father in heaven. Then the Father in heaven must be somewhere in that territory. It says, He causes his Son to rise on the evil and on the good.

He sends his reign on the righteous and on the unrighteous. He's good, and I would say loving, giving to all those people who are totally obnoxious to him.

And Jesus is saying, You should behave the same sort of way. I would have been quite glad for them to hear.

[ 33 : 44 ] During the time that Jesus was saying, Jesus was completely going against the grain.

Yes. Yes. What a good question. What a good observation. If you look in Old Testament history, there are certainly examples where God would encourage his people to make war on Jericho, on the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, all those people.

See, the love of God is not a simple subject, is it?

Because then you say, Did God love the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites? Sent his Son and his reign on them. And they were obnoxious to him. At some point, God's love for whatever it is, his compassion towards rebels, doesn't guarantee their permanent blessing, does it?

That's not the way God's love operates. He might be good and kind to them for a long time, but God is also judge, and at some point he will judge them.

[ 35 : 18 ] So that would be what happens in Old Testament history. It's that sort of complexity.

What about Rahab the Harlot?

So God showed love to her in a particular way, didn't he? Yeah.

Yeah. So the last bit again. The Amalekites had it in for the Israelites. Yes. Yes.

I mean, that's such a good question, isn't it? The Amalekite slave that had run away in the time of David. And his Egyptian master had left him for dead because he was no use to him.

And David picked him up and fed him, didn't he? So he was good to that enemy. Although the enemy in question, this particular Amalekite, claimed to have killed Saul, so he got the chop anyway, didn't he?

[ 36 : 31 ] Such a good question, that is. I'm sorry? Yes, maybe I'm mixing up two of them, am I?

One led him to the enemy, didn't he? That was in Ziklag. Yeah. Yeah, I'm mixing up two. David showed mercy to him, didn't he? The comment on the Amalekites, is that the iniquity of the Amalekites is not yet to be told.

It's delayed for a hundred years. Yeah. Yeah. It's not helped in any of the time. Yeah. It wasn't until there was no hope of the benefit, as it were. Yeah.

The children came. Yes. Thank you. Yes. Which I suppose shows that it isn't a simple subject, is it?

That God's love towards his enemies is not a permanent fixture, but is more in the nature of patience up to a certain point.

So it is quite complex, isn't it? Quite complex. Now, I had one sheet somewhere where I summarised this.

[ 37 : 58 ] And I had three things to say, which was partly to summarise this.

Number one, there are different sorts of love. Love covers quite a spectrum of things when you begin to think about it. Number two, the Bible is quite sparing with broad statements of God's love. It certainly isn't clear that the Bible just keeps on hammering away God loves you, God loves you.

It's much more subtle than that. Number three, love for God and love for neighbour is Jesus' summary of the Old Testament law and should be fundamental to our Christian living.

Those are the three sort of summary points. I'm going to stop there. Anybody want to?