

# SEEING GOD AS HE IS

## LESSON 1 – LOVE

I. God is Love – I John 4:7-8 (not ‘has’ love, but ‘is’ love)

A. Terminology:

1. OT – **‘ahab** (general term) and **chesed** (a genuine affection of lovingkindness, freely given, whether linked to a covenant or not)

2. NT – **agape** (benevolent and altruistic love, even involving affection); a term rarely used in general Greek society and rare in ancient secular literature (perhaps the reason it is exclusively used in scripture)

B. Love, as an essential and primary quality of God, is unique to the bible’s description of deity – *no other religions* (man-made religion) describe deity as having complete, continuous, altruistic, and eternal love as an essential characteristic

1. Several descriptions are provided in relation to His love:

a. It is *great* (Eph 2:4)

b. It is *infinite* (Eph. 3 :18-19)

c. It is *eternal* (Eph. 1:4-5)

d. It is *dependable* (Rom. 8:35)

2. Love is the explanation and the driving force behind several of God’s other eternal characteristics: Grace, Mercy, Forgiveness, Patience, Compassion, and also Persistence/Perseverance

C. Although love is a primary characteristic of God, it is not his *only* primary description; for instance:

1. God is *light* (I John 1:5)

2. God is *holy* (I Peter 1:16)

3. God is *spirit* (John 4:24)

4. God is a *consuming fire* (Heb. 12:29)

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**D.** The only love even more basic than God's love for mankind is the love and closeness shared among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit:

1. The Father's love for the Son: John 17:24, Matt. 3:17 & 17:5, Col. 1:13; several others)
2. Jesus' love for the Father: John 14:31)
3. The Spirit's love: Rom. 15:30)

**E.** There is great evidence suggesting God's love actually shows an *affectionate* relationship with His people

1. Although ***agape*** is almost always used in the NT for divine love, ***philia*** (usually translated as affectionate love) is used in various forms in at least three places in the NT (John 5:20, 16:27; Titus 3:4) in reference to God's relation to the Son and also His children even several OT words regarding God's feelings toward mankind also have connotation suggesting affection or delight (***ratsah, chashaq, chapets***)
2. It should first be clear that a *true* affectionate relationship with God is only possible with His forgiven children (Matt. 7:21-23; Matt.25:21)
3. As creatures who bear His image, God *does* show the presence of true affection for us, yet this is controlled by a perfect knowledge and awareness of our thoughts and emotions as sinners
  - a. Many would claim (as did the pagans) such feelings in an all-powerful God would make Him *less* than all-powerful, able to be manipulated by mankind and no longer truly immutable
  - b. Trying to ascribe the vagaries and capricious nature of human emotions to God (or believing we can think or feel on His level) is foolishness (Isa. 55:8-9; I Cor. 2:9)

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c. Yet, God's nature does allow Him to change His mind about people when they exercise their free will to repent and seek their Father again – due to His love and affection, God can change when man changes (an essential part of a relationship); he is never fooled or manipulated

F. There are multiple biblical analogies reflecting this affection:

1. *Father – Child*: Ez. 16:3-6; Hos. 11:1,4; Ps. 103:13; Rom. 8:15
2. *Mother – Infant*: Isa. 49:15 & 66:13; Mat. 23:37
3. *Husband – Wife*: Hos. 2:1-20 & 3:1; Eph. 5:25; II Cor. 11: 2
4. *Shepherd – Flock*: PS. 23:1-4 & 78:52 & 80:1; Isa.40:11; Jer. 31:10; Ex. 34:11; John 10:11

II. The objects of God's love:

A. All of humanity – Ex.34:6-7, Jer. 31:3, Eph. 1:4-5, **John 3:16**, I John 4:9-10, **Rom. 5:8**

1. Due to His benevolent kindness, God has always directed His love toward mankind, given that they are created in His image and designed to have a relationship with Him
2. God loves **all** men whether sinful or righteous – although he hates sin and men *as sinners* (His creatures disobeying His will, who will suffer unless repentant), He still loves them as **His** creatures – this is clearly described in 2 Peter 3:9 & John 3:16
3. As His children, God commands us to love and do good to all men as He does, even the 'unlovable' and our enemies (see Matt. 5:43-48, Luke 6:35-36, Gal. 6:10); this is only logical, as we are made in His image and cannot truly be like Him and understand Him unless we let Him guide us to *think* and *act* like Him

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**4.** As He is the source of all good blessings of life to all men (James 1:17, I Tim. 6:17), God's loving care extends to all men, even as unbelievers, until judgment (I John 2:2)

**B.** The Patriarchs and nation of Israel – the forerunner of the church and of our personal relationship with God

**1.** As with the individual patriarchs, God specifically chose to love and build a relationship with Israel as a means to bring the Messiah to the world, as a redeemer for all mankind (Gen. 12:3; Deut. 4:37, 7:7-8)

**2.** This purpose is echoed in the NT – Rom. 9:13; Rom. 11:28

**C.** The kingdom or church – the true children of Abraham and the present and final chosen family of God

**1.** All men have now been invited to share in a special personal relationship with their loving God by membership in the body of Christ – Eph. 2:11 – 3:11; Eph. 1:4-6

**2.** As God once loved Israel, now He loves His church as His people – Eph. 5:25-30

**3.** It is important to know that God's love for the Christian is not dependent on man's prior love toward God – our love is always a response to God first loving us (I John 4:19)

**4.** In the church, we are now loved, not just generically as sinners needing redemption, but specifically as children adopted into God's personal family (I John 3:1)

**III.** How is God's love made manifest in the lives of people?

**A.** Concern:

**1.** He is unselfishly interested in us for our own sake – He cares whether we are truly happy and self-fulfilled, and provides all resources necessary for us to achieve this

**2.** He cares about us simply because we are His creatures, made in His image – it is irrational to think we were created

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and then left to be ignored or forgotten in the universe  
(Psalm 14:1; Rom. 1:19-25)

**3.** God is quite able to love us for His own sake as well as our sakes – He can love as part of His divine altruistic nature, as well as when He is drawn or attracted to something in our nature as His creation

**B.** Selflessness: God's desire is to selflessly give of Himself in whatever way needed to create happiness in mankind

**1.** God shows His limitless wisdom and power and goodness by allowing us to exist, and then providing a beautiful and bountiful universe for us to enjoy

**2.** He created us in His own image, with many of His characteristics, able to enjoy the world and develop a loving relationship with Him

**3.** Even before we were created, God prepared for man's sinful fall through the ultimate expression of love: the gift of His Son as a propitiation for our sins

**C.** Action:

**1.** Along with and as part of His nature, God actively manifests this by continually looking after the creation and mankind (Mat. 5:44-45)

**2.** He is willing to extend His loving care to man, even when he fell into sin (Hos. 2:14, 19-20)

**3.** A willingness to chastise His children in love, to help correct their disobedience and restore the relationship (Prov. 3:11-12; Heb. 12:5-6,10)

**4.** The ultimate expression of love, forgiveness, and restoration: allowing His Son to experience the cross, and Jesus' willingness to do so (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:7,25; John 3:16; I John 4:9-10; Rev. 1:5)

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## II. What does God's love teach us about our own nature?

### A. We were created in God's image (Gen. 1:26, 5:1, 9:6)

1. image (*tselem* – resemblance, representative figure, shade, a model)

2. Likeness (*d<sup>e</sup>mûwth* – fashion, like, manner, resemblance, model, shape)

B. We should not expect human characteristics in our God, such as in appearance, intelligence, emotion, and character (Isa. 55:8-9); we often waste so much time debating the appearance of God, the appearance of heaven, and the form of our spiritual bodies, that we miss the immensity of loving God

1. Yet, we still have a great spiritual resemblance to our Father, certainly close enough and advanced enough to participate in a close personal relationship with Him which is pleasing and rewarding for both of us

a. Hebrews 2:7 states we were made "...for a little while lower than **the angels**..."

b. The scripture from whence this quotation in Hebrews is taken is from Psalms 8:5: "Yet, thou hast made him a little lower than **God**..."

c. Clearly, we were made to be elevated above creation but below God – a position of honor and privilege, but also responsibility; this shows the great love He planned for us even before we existed

2. Since God provided for this relationship as we were created, we thus have a spiritual responsibility to seek out this relationship and utilize all the resources He has provided to secure and preserve it (I John 3:1-3)

3. We have been given the amazing gift of *free will*, an important characteristic of God; without this, we could not *choose* to accept God's gifts and have a loving relationship with Him

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**4.** Unfortunately, free will is so powerful that it also caused sin to enter the world, allowing us to reject God's will and salvation, and necessitating the need for God's grace and mercy to restore our relationship

**5.** We must understand, as imperfect creatures living in a relatively unknown, unpredictable, and dangerous world, that we have *very little control* over our environment and life circumstances – *we desperately need God*; this idea is in direct opposition to the prideful attitude of the world, which believes *God does not exist*: thus, man is left to “figure things out” for himself, or has the power and freedom to manipulate and control his own destiny, and truth and morality are therefore relative, individual, and easily changeable (Rom. 1:18-25)

**C.** Knowing how God carefully planned for our existence and future relationship long ago (see Psalm 139:13-18; Eph. 1:4-5 & 2:10), all people should feel loved and valuable, regardless of their status in the eyes of the world

**1.** Human fear and weakness often make us take our eyes off God and tempt us to compare ourselves to others, even with our spirituality – tragically, when we rely on other's opinions to determine our own self-worth, we get a terribly distorted picture

**2.** We innately know we are valuable, but people's opinions of us are often unreliable and inaccurate, subject to individual experience, prejudice, and emotion

**3.** Without a relationship with God, it is easy to feel worthless and alone in the universe

**4.** The only true and objective measure of our self-worth is found when we encounter the love of God – we must see ourselves through His eyes to appreciate who we are

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**III.** What should God's love teach us about our relationship with our fellow man?

**A.** We have already established that each person's soul is more precious and important than the entire rest of creation because of the value God has placed on mankind as His prize creation (Mark 8:36-37; I John 3:1 & 4:9-10; Rom. 5:8 & 8:38-39; Eph. 1:4; 2 Peter 3:9)

**B.** We must recall the message of Matt. 22:36-40, on which the entire gospel rests

**C.** We therefore have no right to denigrate the value of any soul, as that would be an affront to God

**1.** The worldly notion of animals being equal in value to men clearly disagrees with God's purpose and design (Heb. 2:7; Psalm 8:5)

**2.** The belief that one man is intrinsically more valuable or worthy of life or salvation than another is also an affront to God (Lev. 19:15; Rom. 2:11; Acts 10:34-35; Job 34:19; Rom. 12:16; Gal. 3:28; 2 Peter 3:9)

**3.** The belief that things are of more value than people, even one soul, is idol worship and an affront to God

**4.** To disrespect human life (abortion, suicide, homicide, euthanasia, genocide), and to treat others with contempt is also an affront and disrespect to God

**D.** It is sinful to show partiality before God, both inside and outside the church - if God offered His son to all for the purpose of saving their souls (John 3:16), how can we discriminate against those who are difficult or 'unlovable' in the eyes of the world? Who in the world is too evil or too unimportant to deserve the message of the gospel? For whom did Jesus *not* die?

**E.** We must see one another as God does – creatures made in His image; to be children of our Father, we must learn to treat others with love and respect, avoid judging them, and look to their needs



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before our own to teach the gospel (Phil. 2:3-5)

**F.** We must see an urgency in spreading the gospel (Rom.13:11-12; Matt. 24:42-50; 2 Peter 3:9)

**G.** In God's wisdom, our church family exists to support and strength us, provide a living library from which we can learn more about scripture, practice fellowship with others, encourage one another in worship, and be reminded of the love of the Father and Son as we see it living in their lives