

## Love of Another Kind //

The love of God has no starting point. God is eternal, operates above space and time, and is love (1 John 4:8). Put all this together and there is only one reasonable conclusion you can come to: God has always loved you, even before you got here.

Sometimes songwriters and poets claim to have loved a romantic partner before time began or before they even met. That's nice in theory, but when it comes to human relationships, it's simply not true. We don't love something *before* we meet the person. Feelings of love have a beginning and develop over time.

With God, however, He did indeed love you before you knew about Him. You weren't even a twinkle in your parents' eyes and God already loved you. God's love for us existed before we got here, and it's going to exist long after we exit. God's love is *eternal*.

When it comes to God, there are no limits to His love. You can't put any parameters around the love of God. The apostle Paul put it beautifully when he said, "I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:17-19). The love of God simply cannot be measured.

But we sometimes think that because God loves all seven billion of us, He doesn't love each of us individually and personally. Not only would my kids ask me *how much* I loved them, but they would also ask, "Dad, am I your *favorite*?" It was their way of seeing if I were the kind of dad who loved his kids as an amorphous group or loved each one of them as a unique individual. Now, I know I shouldn't have done this, but I would always tell each kid (privately, of course) that he or she was my favorite but not to tell the others—that it was just between us. And, again, they would giggle and run off, happy as a bird with a french fry.

God's love for you is personal. You are His favorite. He doesn't love you because you are a member of the human race. He loves *you* as a unique individual whom no one else on the planet is exactly like.

Saint Augustine said, "God loves each of us as if there were only one of us." God wants you to know that He loves *you*, that *you* are His favorite even though He has billions and billions of favorites, and that He is enamored with *you*. God's love is for all humankind—and for each kind of human.

### **Isaiah 41:10 NIV**

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

### **Romans 5:8 NIV**

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

### **Romans 8:35-39 NIV**

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## **Dropping Our Shame //**

Ever since Adam and Eve disobeyed God, humankind has been coated in shame. God has done all He can to cleanse us of our shame, the greatest expression being Christ's death on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. No one pays a price that high for something unlovable, unworthy, and undesirable. Beyond cleansing our shame by His death on the cross, God made us in His image, adopted us into His royal family, made us spiritually rich, empowered us with His strength, exchanged our old ugly nature for a beautiful one, and included us in His great adventure. After doing all that, how could any of us continue to think of God as a shamer?

To overcome the lie that God is a shamer, I suggest the spiritual discipline of confession. Scripture challenges us to "confess [our] sins to each other and pray for each other so that [we] may be healed" (James 5:16). If we are not honest with others about the sinful things we do and the character defects we struggle with, Satan has a greater opportunity to keep us in bondage to self-condemnation and shame. Richard Foster put it well when he said, "The Disciplines of confession brings an end to pretense. God is calling us into being a Church that can openly confess its frail humanity and know the forgiving and empowering graces of Christ." In counseling, we say, "You are only as sick as your secrets." To overcome shame, we have to quit hiding and covering up. We have to be courageous enough to share our struggles and let the grace and support of others help us heal. Saint Alphonsus Liguori wrote, "For a good confession three things are necessary: an examination of conscience, sorrow, and a determination to avoid sin." First, we must go before God and allow Him to prod our consciences about the things that require His forgiveness. Second, we must experience genuine remorse about having sinned and having hurt the heart of God. Third, we must ask God to help us have a strong desire to live holy lives.

God is no shamer. He came to set you free from shame, cleanse you with His love and grace, reinstate you into His family, and make you part of His great adventure. No, God is no shamer.

### **1 John 1:9 NIV**

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

### **James 5:16 NIV**

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

### **Proverbs 28:13 NIV**

Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.

## God's Plans Cannot Be Stopped //

God had all His plans in place when He created us. He knew exactly how much everything was going to cost, knew exactly what His ultimate goal was, and knew how everything was going to turn out. So what is God's plan? Theologian J. I. Packer, in talking about the overarching narrative of the Bible, said, "Its main theme is not human salvation, but the work of God vindicating his purposes and glorifying himself in a sinful and disordered cosmos. He does this by establishing his kingdom and exalting his Son, by creating a people to worship and serve him, and ultimately by dismantling and reassembling this order of things, thereby rooting sin out of his world." That's a mouthful so let's break it down.

First, the main focus of God's plan is God, not us. If we aren't careful, we think that everything is about us, when it is actually about God. The Bible is a story about *God* expressing who *He* is throughout human history. *He* is the lead actor, and the rest of us are role players.

Second, God's plan is to develop people who will serve and worship Him for His glory. God's plan is not to glorify us but to glorify Himself. That's why the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* is spot-on when after asking, "What is the chief end of man?" it answers, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." Third, God's plan is to completely dismantle our way of looking at reality and reassemble it. This is why Jesus often said, "You have heard that it was said ... but I say ..." (Matt. 5:27-28 ESV). He wanted to drive home just how different God's perspective is from ours. Jesus came to turn everyone's view of reality upside down and inside out because of how far away from reality we have gotten since the fall of man.

Finally, God's plan is to eliminate sin from the world we live in. Obviously, we are not there yet, and we won't get there completely until Christ returns. In the meantime, God gives us His laws, allows painful consequences to come our way when we sin, disciplines us when we keep sinning, sends the Holy Spirit to indwell and convict us, and puts us in "iron sharpens iron" (Prov. 27:17) relationships with others.

God has a plan, and there is nothing we can do to keep Him from executing it. From God's perspective, the issue isn't whether He is going to execute His plan but rather whether we are going to get on board with Him. God, by showing up two thousand years ago, makes us choose which side we are on. We are either for God or against Him; there is no straddling the fence.

### **Jeremiah 29:11 NIV**

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

### **Proverbs 16:9 NIV**

In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps.

### **Matthew 6:25-34 NIV**

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?"

"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."