

*How Much Does God Love You?*

How much does God love you? On one hand, we could never understand how much He loves us because we just cannot humanly comprehend His love for us in its totality. It's just not possible. Our human minds are too limited. For instance, consider the concept of infinity. The human brain cannot really imagine anything that goes on and on forever and ever without stopping, like the infinitely expanding universe or the decimal places of the number *pi*. Yet we can say God's love for us is infinite without completely grasping what that means.

We often apply all kinds of human characteristics to God, like love and justice. But we know that God's justice is more fair than anything the Supreme Court in Washington or the World Court at the Hague could ever muster; we know that God's love for us is deeper and more profound than the love between the fictitious Romeo and Juliet or whomever the world's real most loving couple is today. At best, all our adjectives for God can only approximate His true personality in quantity and quality.

How much does God love you? On the other hand, God does reveal a good deal of Himself and His love to us through various means. No human being in this world could look upon the sheer awesomeness of God as He really is and survive. God unmediated would blow us away. Remember how the Israelites at Mount Sinai begged God to only interact with them through Moses so the sight of Him wouldn't kill them. Remember how Moses was only allowed by God to see His back as he passed by, and not to gaze upon His face. For this reason, God came to us in a way we could handle, in Jesus Christ, who is both God and man.

Jesus was God incarnate down here on earth where we could see and hear and touch him. Jesus is the human face of God. After His Resurrection and exaltation, Christ ascended to

our Father and His father, our God and His God. But he did not abandon us or leave us alone. Christ's earthly ministry continues on in His Word. Christ still speaks to us through Bible, with the New Testament being the inspired writings of his followers. The Holy Spirit proceeds from Christ and comes to us to guide us in to all truth. That is, the Spirit guides us in understanding the Word. This is the same Spirit that spoke through the prophets in our Old Testament.

How much does God love you? The Creation story in Genesis tells us that we are "The Crown of Creation," we are God's greatest creative work. Only mankind is made in God's image; no animal can claim that. God loves us so much that he gave us the earth and animal life as our possession, to use for our needs. He loves us so much that when our first parents were deceived by the serpent and sinned by eating the forbidden fruit, God immediately promised them, and us, a Savior who would one day crush the serpent's head.

We know that Savior to be Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. Since before the beginning of time, God could foresee that if He created humans beings in His likeness that we would sin and that He would have to send His Son to save us. God lovingly, willingly created us anyway, even at that great cost to Himself, so that we could someday be in loving communion with Him. That's love. There is no greater love than to lay down your life for another, especially if that "other" is not worthy of such great love. God loved us even though we were sinners.

To show God's love for you, Jesus voluntarily left His the glory of Heaven to come to earth. We call this the humiliation of Christ. You and I try to avoid humiliation. We don't want to be humiliated, disgraced, or shamed. We don't want to lose prestige or status. But Jesus came to earth and perfectly joined His almighty, infinite, divine nature to our finite, weak, human nature. The Most High God became a human servant.

It's interesting that Jesus is called, and calls himself, a shepherd, a kind of servant, we might say. In Bible times, being a shepherd was not considered prestigious or desirable work. Shepherding was hard dirty work without much compensation. Shepherds were on the bottom rung of society's ladder. For Jesus, the Son of God, to compare himself to a shepherd was absolutely self-effacing.

But Jesus, true God and true man, never totally lost His divine attributes. Every now and then he would use His divine power when it served His purpose, that purpose always being winning our salvation. For instance, Jesus would occasionally use his divine authority to cure a sick person or cast out a demon. But Jesus did not use His power to save Himself from death. He could have called ten thousand angels to defend him at his arrest. He could have got down off the cross. But Jesus chose not to express His divine nature in those instances, so that he might die in our place. He set aside His supernatural abilities so that He would be crucified.

That is where God's love for us is most evident, that God Himself would die for us. If we say that Jesus is God – and we do and He is – then Jesus' death is God's death. But Jesus' death is even more than just God demonstrating how much He loves us. Jesus' death is "for us." When we say that Jesus' death is "for us," we don't just mean that Jesus' death "is for our benefit." We mean that Jesus' death is "in our place" and "in our stead." Jesus gets the punishment we all deserve. Jesus took all of our sins upon Himself and went to the cross that our debt to God might be paid. He ransomed us. He made the sacrifice to God that we aren't strong enough, rich enough, or good enough to make. That sacrifice was Jesus' death. How much does God love you? He died for you. He loved us to death.

But death is not the last word, not by a long shot. We can say Jesus rose from the dead, or that God raised Jesus from the dead, either way is proper. The point is that Jesus lives. Jesus is alive. Jesus' resurrection is the turning point of all history. The Resurrection

changes everything. Previously Jesus was humiliated, now he is exalted. The Servant is now the King, and we live in Jesus' Kingdom. He has bought us, we are His, and we live in Jesus' Kingdom of Grace now and we will live in His Kingdom of Glory later.

Jesus' Kingdom of Grace exists in and through the church, where the gospel is proclaimed and the sacraments administered. Here Jesus calls us by name and initiates us into His flock in the waters of Holy Baptism. Here Jesus prepares a table for us, the altar, the Communion Table, even in the presence of our enemies and His, and He feeds us and nourishes us with His very own body and blood for the strengthening of our faith and the forgiveness of sins. Our cup overflows and runneth over. Even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we do not fear, our fears do not overcome us, because we know, and God's Holy Word tells us, that even as Jesus lives we too shall live.

Nothing will separate us from the love of Christ. Those who believe and trust in Jesus will not die eternally but have eternal life with Jesus and His saints. We will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. That is life in Jesus' Kingdom of Glory.

Jesus promises to come again to renew and recreate the earth and the heavens. Then all the problems we face, all the disease and anxiety and death we experience here, will be no more. Then we will live and reign with Jesus. All will be glorious. We will be completely His, like sheep that belong to a shepherd, and we will be enveloped totally in His love: pure, unconditional, mutual love. Then we will see him, not through intermediaries and the means of grace, but as he actually is. It will all be more glorious than we can comprehend. And He does it all for you because he loves you.

In the mean time, we live by faith. Jesus, like a loving shepherd, leads us and guides us through his Word to live lives in this world that are generous, compassionate, and righteous. His Holy Spirit abides in us, making us more like Him day by day. This is a gift that we cannot earn or buy, although we cling to it with everything we've got. This

daily walk with Christ, this indwelling of the Spirit within us, is another expression of God's love. He loves you so much! More than we can know. Amen.