
The Many Sides of God's Love

"The heavens will praise Your wonders, O LORD; Your faithfulness also in the assembly of the holy ones. For who in the skies is comparable to the LORD? Who among the sons of the mighty is like the LORD, a God greatly feared in the council of the holy ones, and awesome above all those who are around Him? O LORD God of hosts, who is like You, O mighty LORD? Your faithfulness also surrounds You"
(Psalm 89:5-8).

With the deepest of meaning yet with the simplest of phrasing, John wrote, "God is love" (1 John 4:8b). The foundation of His throne is righteousness and justice (Psalm 89:14a), and the heart and core of His being is love. The writer of Psalm 89 said that lovingkindness and truth go before Him, as if they serve as harbingers announcing what He is like and how He will deal with man (v. 14b).

The fact of the loving nature of God should prompt us to ask, "How does God love His people? How should His love for them be described?" The answers to these questions are specifically given or implied by Psalm 89.

First, His love, of necessity, has to be described as *a covenant love*. All of His relationships with man have come out of the covenants He has established with him. He said, "My lovingkindness I will keep for him forever, and My covenant shall be confirmed to him" (v. 28). He has bound Himself—in the past and present—by the agreements He has made with His people. He will show His love by keeping His part of those promises.

The writer of Hebrews, quoting from Jeremiah 31:33, 34, wrote concerning the Christian Age,

"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all will know Me, from the least to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more" (8:10-12).

The cross is the heart of God's covenant to us. It brought this special age that would be governed by the new covenant. The writer of Hebrews also wrote: "But now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Hebrews 9:26b). "The consummation of the ages" must refer to the end of the Old Covenant and the bringing about of the new age, the age of complete forgiveness from God. Indeed, God is a God of the new covenant, the agreement with us to save us through Christ's blood.

Second, His love is often viewed, and obviously must be viewed, as *a faithful love*. He will be true to those who trust in Him by keeping His word to them. Nothing on earth or in heaven is more reliable than God's love. He said, "My covenant I will not violate, nor will I alter the utterance of My lips" (Psalm 89:34). As certain as the sun shines and the moon rises, God will keep His eternal word.

God wanted to show us that His promise to us will stand and He guaranteed it by His word and an oath:

In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 6:17-20).

This assurance of His faithfulness to us gives

the strongest hope, which, in turn, provides an anchor for our souls.

Third, His love must be seen as a *righteous love*. He is holy and cannot sin or be tempted to sin (see James 1:13). He will see to it that His promises are kept but He will keep them in harmony with His righteous character. If man violates the covenant he has entered into with God, man will be punished; even if God's people transgress and do not keep His commandments, they will suffer the consequences. Judgment is necessary because of the righteous character of His love. No child ultimately appreciates a parental love that contains no high and holy standards within it.

God's righteousness demanded the cross. Those who abide in His justification provided by it are protected from the awful condemnation of sin. Jesus' death was a demonstration of God's righteousness. Paul said of Jesus: "Whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:25, 26). In Him, we have God's continual offer of His grace. John assured us, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Fourth, His love has an *eternal character to it*. He loves the world and His people with a deep, abiding, never-ending love. He said of David, "His descendants shall endure forever and his throne as the sun before Me" (Psalm 89:36).

Man may refuse God's love and defy His will, but God continues to love man and will receive him when he comes in penitence to Him. The Spirit put God's word for Judah in Jeremiah's mouth: "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3b). God is the father of the prodigal-son story who is ever watching for the return of His son (see Luke 15).

The cross of Jesus rises above time in reaching to those who have lived, who are living, and who will live. His death is the crux of the Bible. That which has gone before looks forward to it, and that which comes after looks backward to it. The cross is the eternal expression of the love of God for man.

No love could be more reassuring and comforting than the love that God has for His people. Who would be encouraged in the long run by the fickle love of a tyrant, who loves you one day and hates you the next, who acts justly one moment but is constrained by wickedness the next? To know that we are loved with a covenant, faithful, righteous, and eternal love can weld our hearts more completely and finally to Him. Such a love inflames within us the desire, yea the determination, to spend our entire lives in His love.

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How does God want to be known? For His great power? For His complete knowledge? Psalm 89 says that He is building up the knowledge of His lovingkindness and faithfulness day by day. He wants this special structure of understanding to be known throughout the world and heaven.