

We've been considering God's glory in His nature and attributes, and last week in considering God's goodness, I mentioned that Scripture assumes God's mercy, grace, love, and patience under His goodness. These are all expressions of His goodness (or kindness).

And yet, I want to return to a specific aspect of God's goodness this morning, in His love. John tells us, "God is love." And I basically want to consider three things about God's love: Its Distinctions, Its Expressions, and Its Applications.

- I. Its Distinctions
- II. Its Expressions
- III. Its Applications

I. Its Distinctions

1. Historically, theologians distinguish two aspects of God's love—His love of benevolence and His love of complacency.
2. Thomas Manton—"Divines distinguish of a twofold love; a love of benevolence and a love of complacency. God loves us both these ways."
3. (1) Love of benevolence—by this is meant, God's general love of all creation as evidenced in His goodwill toward them.
4. Fundamental to God's love of benevolence is His generosity and kindness—it's evidenced in His open-handedness.
5. Fundamental to love is the idea of giving—love gives for the good of others—true love seeks the good of others.
6. Jn.3:16—"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son"—this is an act of God's benevolent love.
7. 1Jn.4:10—"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."
8. In fact, as I will argue later, the giving of Christ is the highest expression of God's benevolent love for mankind.
9. Thus, essential to the love of God is His intent to do good to His creation—love (in general) seeks the good of its object.
10. Duet.10:18—"He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing."
11. Loving the stranger or foreigner is evidenced in giving them food and clothing, these are expressions of love.
12. And so, God's love of benevolence, is His good-will or kindness, wherein He seeks to do good to His creation.
13. God is loving, and because He is loving, He seeks the good of others, providing for their physical and spiritual good.
14. This is why the Old KJV translates the word for love as "charity" as charity refers to giving aid because of pity.
15. Thus, there is a sense in which we could say God's love of benevolence is His charity—giving to those in need.
16. (2) Love of complacency—by this is meant, God's special love of His redeemed people, wherein He delights in them.
17. The term complacent simply means satisfied or content—here it refers to the idea of delighting because of satisfaction.
18. For example, if you had an object that satisfies you, you would find delight in that object—you would delight in it with complacency.
19. This is true with regards to God—as He views us in Christ He is satisfied with us and thus finds delight in us.

20. Zeph.3:17—"The LORD your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing."
21. This prophecy foretells God's gracious and loving salvation in Christ—but notice it speaks more of God than us.
22. He will be in our midst—He will save us—but notice, how He responds—"He rejoices over us with gladness and singing."
23. But I want you to notice this little phrase—"He will quiet you with His love"—that is, He is satisfy us with His love.
24. In other words—His rejoicing over us with gladness and singing, are expressions of His love of complacency.
25. Ps.147:11—"The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him" Ps.149:4—"The LORD takes pleasure in His people" Prov.11:20—"The blameless at heart are His delight"
26. Notice, this aspect of God's love is restricted to His people who fear Him and are blameless at heart—He takes pleasure in them and they are His delight.
27. These refer to His love of complacency or delight—He rejoices in them as they bear His image and walk in His ways.
28. Jn.14:21—"He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." Jn.14:23—"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him."
29. Our Savior speaks about the Father loving those who love Him—the Father loves those who love and obey Christ.
30. I suggest to your that by this our Savior is referring to the Father's love of complacency—He delights in them.
31. Put another way, the Father delights in those who love Him and obey Him—these bring Him greater joy and delight.
32. The more we love and obey Him the greater He loves us, or delights in us, as the object of His divine satisfaction.
33. And thus, I want to say two brief things about these two aspects of God's love, before we come to our second heading.
34. (a) God's love of benevolence logically comes before His love of complacency—by His love of benevolence He intends to do us good, and by His love of complacency He delights in that good.
35. Now—notice I said "logically," because technically speaking, these two aspects of God's love are one in Him.
36. Remember, all of God's attributes are one in God—they differ not in themselves, but in the objects they encounter.
37. But, here I am speaking about a logical distinction—for example, because of His benevolent love He chose us in Christ, and because He chose us in Christ He delights in us.
38. Perhaps I can put it this way—because the Father delights in Christ, He only delights in those who are in Christ.
39. It was His love of benevolence that elected us in Christ, and it's His love of complacency that delights in those in Christ.
40. Mark Jones—"God's benevolent love is logically prior to his complacent love. It could hardly be otherwise, because God's love of benevolence is the fountain of election and all blessings the elect receive. The love of complacency delights in the good that is in his elect—but that good is only there because of his benevolent love."
41. (b) God's love of benevolence is universal while His love of complacency is limited—that is, limited to His people.
42. This answers the question whether God loves everyone or not—in one sense God loves all men, and in another sense He does not.
43. God loves all men with a love of benevolence—He gives them temporal things (food and clothing) and eternal (the gospel).
44. Thus, in this sense the fact that God commands His gospel to be preached to all men, is an expression of His benevolent love.

45. He benevolently and generously bestows good things upon His creation, Ps.145:9—"The LORD is good to all; He has compassion on all He has made."
46. But God does not delight in wickedness, and thus, in this sense, He does not love wicked and unrighteous people.
47. Prov.11:20—"Those who are of a perverse heart *are* an abomination to the LORD, but *the* blameless in their ways *are* His delight."
48. Thomas Manton—"God's hatred of abomination is opposite to His love of complacency but not His love of benevolence."
49. In this this sense the Scripture teaches, God's hates the wicked, and yet, in another sense, has a universal love for all men.
50. How can God hate and love at the same time? Because He loves all men with a love of benevolence and not with a love of complacency (delight).
51. In fact, when God fails to love a person with a love of complacency, it necessarily entails the opposite (that is, the opposite of delight).
52. What is the opposite of delight but hate. Thus, in this sense we can affirm that God can love and hate the same person.
53. You see brethren, it's by maintaining these old distinctions, we are able to make sense of all the texts of the Bible.

II. Its Expressions

1. Here I want to suggest five ways in which God's love is evidenced or made known (these are not the only ways, but five obvious ways).
2. (1) God's love is expressed in Himself—that is, God loves Himself—each Person loves the other two Persons.
3. This is where we must begin, though many Christians today fail to think in these terms—What or who does God love the most?
4. If we were to ask 100 Christians this question, what do you think they would say? How many would say, most of all God loves Himself?
5. But that is exactly right—God loves Himself with a perfect love, because, He alone is worthy of perfect love.
6. John Gill—"The three divine Persons in the Godhead mutually love each other; the Father loves the Son and the Spirit, the Son loves the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit loves the Father and the Son."
7. Jn.3:35—"The Father loves the Son" Jn.5:20—"For the Father loves the Son" Jn.14:31—"But that the world may know that I love the Father."
8. This is another way of saying, God delights in Himself—God loves Himself with a love of perfect complacency.
9. Now, it's important to understand, the love that exists within the Godhead is eternal and essential among the three Persons.
10. While God has loved His people from eternity, we have to distinguish between the love He has for His people and His love for Himself.
11. Perhaps we can say—the love He has for Himself is native, while the love He has for His creation is volitional (the first is a necessity, the second is not)
12. But we could also say, His love for Himself is the reason He loves us—because He loves Himself, He loves His creation.
13. (2) God's love is expressed in election—that is, it was because of love He elected or chose His people from eternity.
14. Eph.1:5—"In love having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will."
15. Dear brethren, why did God choose before creation, to save a people out of this world to serve and glorify Him?
16. There have been so many professing Christians who have refused to believe the clear teaching of Holy Scripture.

17. It's tragic that so many Christians fight over this issue, but you know, election is intended to encourage Christians.
18. This is why, generally speaking, the most condensed passages where election is found is in the NT epistles (letters).
19. Why? Because these were intended to instruct the churches in the truth of the many doctrines of the Christian faith.
20. And what is one of those truths? That you became a Christian because God eternally chose you as His very own.
21. And do you know what? Almost every time election is mentioned, it's attributed to the unconditional love of God.
22. 1Thess.5:13—"But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the LORD, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation."
23. Rom.8:29—"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son"—God foreknew people not events (whom He foreknew).
24. What does it mean to foreknew someone—it means to know them beforehand—God knew them in that He loved them.
25. What a tragedy dear brethren, that such a comforting truth is oftentimes nothing more than an object of debate.
26. (3) God's love is expressed in conversion—by this I mean, God displays His love when He calls us to Himself.
27. Jer.31:3—"Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, with lovingkindness I have drawn you."
28. Notice, because God first loved us with an everlasting love, that He in time drew us to Him, with loving-kindness.
29. Eph.2:4-5—"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)."
30. O brethren, what a tremendous thought! Why were you Christian, brought out of darkness into His marvelous light?
31. Here is the ultimate reason—because God loved you—and because He loved you, He brought you to Himself.
32. (4) God's love is expressed at the cross—that is, God's love for man is manifested in giving Christ to die for them.
33. Jn.3:16—"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" Rom.5:8—"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
34. Remember, love gives for the good of those loved—and thus, the greater the object given, the greater the love shown.
35. Perhaps I can put it like this—nowhere is God's love more evident or obvious, then at the cross of Jesus Christ.
36. 1Jn.4:10—"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."
37. In other words—the greatest display of love known to man, is found in God giving His Son to be a sacrifice for sin.
38. John says He sent His Son "to be the propitiation for our sins"—that is, the sacrifice that satisfied God's wrath.
39. J.W. Alexander (in sermon on 1Jn.4:10)—"Propitiatory love is the chief outshining of the Supreme splendor."
40. Nothing tells us God is love like the cross. The groans of Christ speak of God's love. His shed blood speaks of God's love. Nothing speaks of the love of the Father and Son as the cross.
41. The cross is a pulpit from which God's love is proclaimed. The cross is a stage upon which God's love is displayed.
42. And this is why dear friends, the Father crucified His Son where and when He did—outside of Jerusalem at the busiest time of the year.

43. Remember, our Savior was crucified at the time of Passover, which meant there were millions of people in Jerusalem.
44. And then if you remember, He had Pilate write THIS IS JESUS KING OF THE JEWS in all three known languages (Greek, Hebrew, and Latin).
45. Why? But because God wanted the entire world to behold His love as it was expressed in the crucifixion of His Son!
46. (5) God's love is expressed in heaven—by this I mean, everything in heaven will display God's love for eternity.
47. O brethren, it's impossible to fully grasp how wonderful heaven will be, as God's love will eternally shine upon us.
48. Here in this present world, the awareness and assurance of God's love is often eclipsed by doubts and difficulties.
49. Perhaps we can liken these to clouds that often hide the sense of God's love—and for most Christians our days are filled with overcast.
50. But dear brethren, there's not a cloud in the sky in heaven—there God's love will shine as the sun shines at noonday.

III. Its Applications

1. Here I want to simply suggest three proper responses each of one of us should have, as we ponder the love of God.
2. (1) If God is love, let us keep ourselves in His love, Jude 1:21—"keep yourselves in the love of God"—that is, keep yourself in the knowledge and assurance of His love.
3. Now, here I need to say something that may be misunderstood—I have mentioned before that God's attributes are God.
4. God is not merely loving but He is love—and this is equally true of every attribute—God and His attributes are one.
5. And thus, each attribute is God viewed from a specific perspective, and thus, God isn't any more one attribute than another.
6. I think this is often how many people view God—yes, He is wise, holy, righteous, and just, but He is really loving.
7. No, God is equally and essentially wise, holy, righteous, just, and loving—He is no more one than He is the others.
8. But, having said that—there is a sense in which the Scripture allows us to think uniquely of God's covenant love.
9. The Scripture speaks about knowing and experiencing God's love in ways it does not speak about the other attributes.
10. Are we to keep ourselves in the wisdom of God? Yes. Are we to keep ourselves in the power of God? Yes. Are we to keep ourselves in the holiness of God? Yes.
11. But, Scripture nowhere expressly uses that terminology, but it does exhort us to keep ourselves in the love of God.
12. Thus, in terms of our experience, we can properly say, there is a uniqueness with regards to knowing God's love.
13. Rom.5:5—"The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit"—that is, the knowledge of God's love.
14. Thus, to "keep ourselves in the love of God" entails we keep ourselves in the knowledge, belief, and assurance of God's love for us.
15. (2) If God is love, let us reciprocate His love—that is, if God loves us, let us love God, our neighbor, and enemy.
16. 1Jn.4:7—"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God (from God); and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God."
17. Brethren, how are we able to love God and others, but because we have come to know and experience God's love.

18. Thus, how are we able to love God and others more? But by knowing and experiencing God's love more deeply.
19. Let me put this another way—the fact of God's love of us, is a powerful motivation for our love for Him and others.
20. 1Jn.4:11—"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another"—because God loves us, we must love others.
21. Brethren, let me put this as plainly as I can—a person who does not love, has never come to know God's love.
22. It's impossible to encounter God's love and remain the same—knowledge of God's love fuels our love for others.
23. What is the essence of the law? Love. Love to God and to our neighbor. And how are we to obey or fulfill that law?
24. Dear brethren, we must remember, the only way to love and thus fulfill the law, is to know God's love for us.
25. It's the knowledge of God's love in Christ, that enables us to fulfill the law of love toward God and our neighbor.
26. (3) If God is love, let us know His love—that is, let us come to savingly know His love in the Person of Jesus Christ.
27. The Scripture allows us to describe what a Christian is in many ways—a Christian is someone who believes in Christ, is a disciple of Christ, is born again, etc.
28. But perhaps the most beautiful way to describe a true Christian is follows—someone who has come to know God's love for them in Christ.
29. 1Jn.4:16—"And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him."
30. What a wonderful way to describe a Christian—a person who has known and believed the love that God has for them.
31. And how does a person come to know and believe the love that God has for them, but by coming to the cross.
32. This doesn't mean that Jesus is yet hanging on the cross, no, He's in heaven presently sitting upon a glorious throne.
33. But it's there at the cross that you behold two things you must believe, if you are ever to come to know God's love.
34. First, at the cross you see your sins—for why do you think He suffered—why did our beloved Savior have to die that death?
35. But because of our sin. The Father punished Him in our place. You have to believe that you are guilty and deserve to die.
36. Secondly, at the cross you see your Savior—you must not only know your predicament (as a sinner), but God's provision (as a Savior).
37. You must come to that One who was dead but now lives, and you must bow the knee to Him as Lord and Savior.
38. You must behold in Him the love of God, and you must come to Him for salvation with nothing but empty hands.