

# *THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST*

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

## **SOUL-SAVING LESSONS** **“The Eternal Love of God”**

### **Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

*THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST*. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16). Welcome to our study of the eternal love of God. What is it that will motivate people to want to be saved and to want to go to Heaven? One of the greatest factors is the wonderful love that God has for humankind. Think about it: God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that we could go to Heaven?! Look at the sacrifice and love that God has shown for mankind.

There are a host of passages in the Scripture that teach us about God’s wonderful love. Paul speaks about this in Romans 5:6-8.

“When we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

When man was at his worst, God sent the antidote for sin. He gave His Son so that we could have the hope of Heaven. John was thinking about the idea of God’s wonderful love when he said in 1 John 3:1, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!” And this we are! What a privilege and blessing it is to be a child of God—something that is possible because of the love of God. The love of God is not just a wonderful idea or a beautiful idea in Scripture, but is a motivating factor for obedience to the Gospel and faithfulness to Jesus Christ. Paul mentioned this in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15.

“The love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.”

The fact that Christ died for us ought to motivate and compel us to want to do the will of God. One of the most illustrative passages of the love of God is found in 2 Corinthians 8:9. Notice the beautiful picture of God’s love from Heaven’s standpoint: “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” Think about all that Jesus had. He was in the very place where we want to go. He left Heaven, came to Earth, did not have a place to call His own, lived as a man, was ridiculed by His own creation, hung on a cruel cross, and died because He loved us so much that He wanted us to go to Heaven. Truly, nothing can separate us from the love of God, which is one of the most powerful factors in salvation (Rom. 8:37-39).

But along with the idea of God’s love is His eternal nature. God Himself has existed forever. That is a hard idea to explain. God has always been. In Psalm 90:1-2 we are told, “From everlasting to everlasting, You are God.” Jesus prayed in John 17:3, “Restore to Me that which we had from eternity.” He is the eternal King. In Deuteronomy 33:27 we read

that He is the eternal God (Ps. 93:2; Is. 57:15). Jeremiah 10:10 and Isaiah 57:15 teach us that He “inhabits eternity.” We see in Scripture the beautiful picture that God is eternal. These ideas combine uniquely to show us His eternal plan to save mankind. God’s eternal nature, and His love, are uniquely tied together in His eternal plan to save mankind. In 2 Timothy 1:9 we learn that God had been working from before time began to save mankind. In 1 Peter 1:18-20 we are told that we are

“not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.”

Before God created the world or mankind, He already had planned a way to save us. Thus, we are living in hope of eternal life, “which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began” (Tit. 1:2). We believe in the love of God, but do we really appreciate and take comfort in that love? Or do we sometimes view God as a fearful and vindictive God Who is waiting for us to mess up so He can punish us? Let’s realize that God is a loving God. He is the epitome of love. Yes, He will punish those who do not do His will. But we also need to see God as a God of love.

How can we see God’s love? I want to do two important things in this lesson. First, I want us to see how God’s love is demonstrated. How can we come to see and appreciate the love of God? Second, I want us to ask, “What does the love of God demand of us?” How is God’s love demonstrated? Where can I see it? And just as important, we need to know (in view of God’s great love) what God’s love requires of us. What does God ask of us to show our love for Him?

Let’s examine first how the love of God is demonstrated toward each and every one of us today. How can we know that God loves us? God’s love is clearly illustrated in the sacrifice death of His Son for our sins. We can know that God loves us because He sent His Son to this world to hang in agony on a cruel cross in order to die as a sacrifice for our sins. As we see Jesus on the cross, we see a picture of God’s great love. In 1 Peter 2:24 we are told that we are “healed by His stripes.” Those stripes heal us from our sin. We see Jesus on the cross. He hung there in agony for our sins so that we could have the hope of Heaven. In 2 Corinthians 5:21 Paul wrote about this sacrifice and the love of God it represented: “He [God] made Him [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Christ was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin (Heb 4:15). But God made Him to be a sin offering for us so that we could escape the penalty of sin. When John the Immerser saw Jesus approaching on one occasion, he said, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn. 1:29). Isaiah wrote about this many years before it happened when he said, “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed” (Is. 53:5).

Think for just a moment about the events that led up to the crucifixion of Jesus on Golgotha. Think, too, about how much God loves us, and how that love is illustrated in the sacrifice of Jesus. Christ committed no sin, yet evil men bound His hands (Mk. 15:1). They carried Him away as a common criminal. They mocked Him. They laughed at Him. They spit in His face. They took their hands and beat Him. They then placed a crown of thorns on His head (and we are not talking about small briars, but needlelike thorns that pierced His brow). They beat Him on the head with a rod. They beat Him repeatedly on His back with a whip like a cat-o-nine-tails. Can you imagine the bloody back of Jesus and the thorn-pierced brow? Then they took a robe and placed it on His back. Scripture tells us that they then removed the robe. Can you imagine how the blood dried and attached the robe to His

back, and how that felt when they removed the robe, causing the bleeding and pain to begin all over again? They took Him to the hill known as Golgotha where they nailed His hands and His feet to the cross. He hung in agony until He drew His last breath. Why did Jesus do that? Why did God permit it? It is the clearest picture we can have of the love of God. Hebrews 2:9 tells us that "Jesus tasted death for everyone." When we ponder how God's love is demonstrated, we should think about what God allowed His Son to suffer.

But there is another way we can know how much God loves us. God's love is exemplified in the forgiveness of sins. The very fact that God is willing to forgive us of our sins is a clear indication of His love. In Matthew 27:46 Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Do you know what the answer to that question is? **We** are the answer. Isaiah 59:1-2 teaches us that separates us from God. God "is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness" (Hab. 1:13). Yet God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf. God allowed His Son to be our sin sacrifice. Momentarily, our sins were placed on Him (1 Pet. 2:24). We must consider God's love in light of the forgiveness that He offers through His Son. One of the most beautiful passages showing us God's forgiveness is found in Psalm 103:10-12.

"He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."

When we obey the Gospel because of the sacrifice of Jesus, do we understand what this passage is saying? We do not get what we deserve because we have sinned. The psalmist said in Psalm 130:3-5, "If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared." If every time I sinned, God put a mark on a board, on the Day of Judgment, would I be able to stand? No. No one would. Thus, God offers us forgiveness. Hebrews 8:12 teaches us about the forgiveness of God: "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." Micah 7:18 teaches us about God's forgiveness when it says, "Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy." As Jesus taught about the Lord's Supper in Matthew 26:28 He said in regard to the fruit of the vine, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." We can know God loves us because He sacrificed His own Son and because He is willing to forgive us of sin.

But we also can see God's love through the picture of God found within His Word. God showed us His love by giving us the Bible. We have the revealed, perfect, complete Word of God. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Bible is not a book of human origin. Instead, "holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). This book is "all truth." Jesus said, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (Jn. 17:17). That truth is what sets us free from sin. John 8:32 teaches us, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Every word of God is pure and true (Ps. 119:160; Ps. 19:6-8).

How is God's love illustrated through His having given us His divine revelation? It is by the words found within the Bible that we are saved. Romans 1:16 says that the Gospel is "God's power unto salvation." James thought about the saving power found in the Gospel when he said in James 1:21, "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." How can we

find salvation? We find it through the Word of God (1 Pet. 1:23-25). We are “born again by the word of God.” It is God’s Word (as revealed in the Bible) that makes salvation available. We know God loves us because He gave us the Bible—the message of salvation.

We also can see God’s love because He has provided for our physical and spiritual needs. One of the great things about being Christians is knowing that God will take care of all of our needs. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (Jas. 1:17). In Matthew 6:24 Jesus taught about God taking care of our needs when He taught about the birds of the air. He also said, regarding the lilies of the field, that “even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” Jesus said that we are of more value than birds or lilies. We are the pinnacle of God’s creation, and God will take care of us. Paul realized this in his own life, and stated it very clearly in Philippians 4:19 when he wrote, “My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” One of the most beautiful statements about God taking care of and providing for His own is found in Psalm 37:25 where King David wrote, “I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread.” In this picture of life, David looked back and wrote of what he had seen. He knew that righteous people will not starve because God takes care of His own. We can know that God loves us because He has made promises to us, and has fulfilled those promises.

We also can know that God loves us because of what He has promised us after this life. God’s love is showered upon us in the beautiful promise that we have of Heaven. Jesus said, “The righteous shall go away into eternal life” (Mt. 25:46). Jesus taught His disciples, “Pray, our Father who art in heaven.” That is what makes Heaven wonderful—the fact that God is there and that we can be there one day with Him. Jesus said in John 14 that He was going to return to the Father. His disciples said, “We do not know where You are going, and we do not know the way.” Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (Jn. 14:6). Don’t you want to go to Heaven? Think about the beauty and splendor of that place. The writer of Hebrews said, “There remains therefore a rest for the people of God” (Heb. 4:9). Don’t you want to go to that wonderful place of rest that is described in Revelation 21:3-4 as a place where there will be no more death, sorrow, or sin because all the former things will have passed away? Can we see God’s love for us demonstrated? Absolutely!

But the love of God also demands things of us. God’s love is a free gift. It is the most beautiful and motivating factor in Scripture. But if we are to view the love of God correctly, we also must come to realize what the love of God demands of us. For example, it demands that we obey God’s will. We cannot say, “God, I love you,” and then live any way we want to. The first and greatest commandment is, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength” (Mk. 12:30). Jesus taught, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Mt. 7:21). Jesus asked a haunting question of the people of His day who considered themselves to be the religious elite: “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ yet do not the things that I say?”

John 14:15 teaches us, “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” In the companion passage (John 15:14) Jesus said, “You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.” Are there any conditions to the love of God? Or, is it just a free gift that is nothing more than a feeling? No, it is not. God said, “If you love Me, you must keep My commandments!” “Behold, to obey is better than to sacrifice” (1 Sam. 15:22). The love of God demands that we obey His will. It also demands that we live a faithful Christian life. We cannot say,

"I love God, and God loves me. Now, I'm going to live however I want to." The Scriptures teach that because of the love of God, we must live faithfully before God and Christ. Paul thought about his life on Earth in view of the love of God when he said,

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me: and the life that I now live in the flesh I live in faith—the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20-21).

Paul realized that his life was no longer all about him. Because of God's love, he, too, had been crucified. It is the love of Christ "that compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:14-15). We must die to sin so that we can live faithfully before Christ. In Romans 12:1 Paul illustrated how our lives as Christians must be sacrificial in nature:

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

How are our lives to be viewed as Christians? We are to be "living sacrifices." We are to serve God acceptably and live transformed lives. Jesus spoke to Christians in the first century who were suffering when He said, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). Jesus taught that our view of life must be, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Mt. 6:33). Paul illustrated his own view of life when he said in Philippians 1:21, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Jesus demands that each of us deny ourselves, take up our crosses daily, and follow Him. Living a faithful Christ life is what God demands in view of His love for us.

The love of God also demands that we love who are inside the family of God. In Hebrews 13:1 we are told, "Let brotherly love continue." We must not be like the people mentioned in Luke 10:30 who passed by the man who had been hurt. Rather, we must be like the good Samaritan who was willing to stop and help the man. Jesus taught us this in John 13:34-35 when He said,

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

The love of God demands that we love those inside the family of God. How can a person say, "I love God, but I don't like the family of God," or "I love God, but I don't like my spiritual brothers and sisters"? If we do not love the family, then you really do not love the Father either. We must love God's children.

The love of God also demands that we love the lost enough to try to save their souls. We cannot say, "I love God," yet not have the concern that we ought to have for those who are lost in sin. In Luke 19:10 we read that Jesus came "to seek and to save the lost." Jesus taught us that our mission is to go into all the world and spread the Gospel to every creature (Mk. 16:15). Paul taught that we are to "warn every man and teach every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1:28).

Do you really understand the love of God? God loved us so much that He sacrificed His Son for us. He gave us the Bible. He is willing to forgive our sins. He has promised to always take care of us. Plus, we have the wonderful hope of Heaven. If you see God's love, then the next question is: Have you responded properly to that love? The love of God demands that we obey Him. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments"

(Jn. 14:15). Do you really love the Lord? Do you love God? If so, have you obeyed the Gospel as Jesus taught?

Jesus said that in order to become a Christian, you must hear the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). You must be willing to believe in Him as God's Son. John 8:24 teaches that if a person does not believe in Jesus, he or she cannot be saved. One a person believes in Jesus, you must be willing to repent of your sins (Lk. 13:3). And you must confess the name of Jesus before men (Mt. 10:32-33). Having done those things, you also must be baptized in water to be saved. It was Jesus Who said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mk 16:16). If you have seen God's love, then you need to ask yourself, "Have I obeyed the Gospel? Am I living 'faithfully unto death'"? Our prayer for you today is that you will love God enough to obey the Gospel and be faithful all the days of your life. May God help each of us to love Him as He has loved us.

**Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

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## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “THE ETERNAL LOVE OF GOD”

1. What does John 3:16 tell us about God’s love?
2. According to Romans 5:6-8, how did God demonstrate His love for humankind?
3. What did the apostle John mean when he said in 1 John 3:1, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God”?
4. According to 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, what should motivate us to want to return God’s love?
5. If we are faithful to God, what can separate us from God’s love (Rom. 8:39)?
6. According to 2 Timothy 1:9, when did God set in motion a plan for man’s salvation?
7. Peter taught in 1 Peter 1:18-20 that we are saved by something precious. What is that “something”?
8. One of the ways that we know of God’s love for us is because of the sacrificial nature of that love. According to 1 Peter 2:24, what did God sacrifice for us?
9. In 2 Corinthians 5:21 Paul wrote about the love of God and a certain sacrifice that came about as a result of that love. What was that sacrifice?
10. What important aspect of God’s love is revealed in passages like Psalm 103:10-12 and Micah 7:18?
11. According to passages like John 17:17, Psalm 119:160, James 1:21, and 1 Peter 1:23-25, what is another way that God has shown us His eternal love?
12. What is another aspect of God’s love that is revealed in passages such as James 1:17, Matthew 6:24, and Matthew 6:33?
13. According to Titus 1:2 and Matthew 25:46, what has God’s love caused Him to offer those who love and obey Him?
14. How, according to Mark 12:30, should we respond to the eternal love of God?
15. What important point is taught in John 14:15 and John 15:14?
16. According to Hebrews 13:1 and 1 Peter 2:17, what is something that we can do to show God how much we appreciate His love for us?
17. According to Romans 12:1, what will “the love of God” compel us to be?
18. According to Paul’s statement in Colossians 1:28, what will the love of God cause us to want to do?