

# Knowing the Great Counselor: The Attributes of God in Biblical Soul Care The Love of God

## I. Introduction:

If you ask the average American to list an attribute of God, one of the most common answers you are likely to receive is love. With something that seems to be common knowledge, it should be easily defined and understood. Everybody knows that God is love right? It's right there in the Bible -

**1 John 4:8 - Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.**

But what does it mean for God to be loving? Does He love everyone the same? Does He ever stop loving someone? The confusion over what love means also leads to many questions about evil, pain, injustice, even pandemics. If God really loves us, why all of the pain? What about hell? A biblical understanding of God's love is vital to answer these questions both for our own souls and for those we counsel.

1. To cut through all of the confusion, and establish a definition of love as we will use it in this study, it is helpful to think about how the term love is used today. What are some answers you would be likely to get from our culture about the meaning of love?

### **Definitions:**

*Systematic Theology*, Grudem pg 199 - "God's love means that God eternally gives of Himself to others"

*Biblical Doctrine*, MacArthur and Mayhue pg 181 - "God's perfect love is his determination to give of himself to himself and to others, and His affection for himself and his people."

2. What are some differences between the world's perception of love, and the definition from Biblical Doctrine?
3. How might God give of Himself to Himself? How might He give of Himself to others? Give examples from Scripture.

This morning we are going to explore the ways that the Bible teaches us about the loving actions of God, and His affections as he reveals them. This is by no means an exhaustive study of love in Scripture, but it is designed to be a helpful overview of God's love to assist us in counseling ourselves and others.

## **II. God's love within the trinity**

Before we think about God's love for people we need to recognize that God loves God. In eternity past, the three persons of the one being of God each give of themselves for the good of the other persons. The Father loves the Son and the Spirit, and Son loves the Spirit and the Father, And the Spirit loves the Son and the Father. There is an eternal happiness and there is perfect self giving love within the trinity.

John 5:20

**20 For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel.**

John 17:24-26

**24 Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. 26 I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."**

4. How is the loving relationship within the trinity comforting to us?

## **III. God's love for creation**

5. Does God love things that aren't human?

Genesis 1: 24-25

**24 And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. 25 And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.**

6. How do we see God's care for creation in these verses?

Matthew 6:26-30

**26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?**

7. In these verses we see God's care for seemingly insignificant animals and even fields! How does Jesus use this illustration to comfort his disciples?

*God loves His character reflected in creation*

**Isaiah 61:8 - For I the LORD love justice; I hate robbery and wrong; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.**

**Psalms 33:5 - He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD.**

8. In verses like these, we see God's love for moral actions that are consistent with His character. How is this revelation in itself an act of love by God to people?

*God loves everybody...right?*

9. Does God love all people? How do you know?

Genesis 1:27-31

**27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them...**

**31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.**

10. Does God have a special love for humanity over and above the rest of creation?

John 3:16-18

**16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.**

11. There are several clues in these verses that allude to God’s love for the whole world. What are they?

Luke 19:41-44

**41 And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, 42 saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side 44 and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”**

12. Why is Jesus weeping? For whom is He weeping?

13. Why doesn’t God save Jerusalem?

#### **IV. God’s love for His elect.**

This is where we get into the special love that God has for his people. This is truly an amazing love. We would do well to read and meditate on each of the following facets of the love God has for his people.

##### **a. Self Initiating love -**

Deut. 7:6-8

**6 “For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. 7 It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt**

14. Why does God love Israel?

1 John 4:10, 19

**10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.**

**19 We love because he first loved us.**

Romans 5:6-8

**6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

15. According to these verses, what do we have that makes God love us?

16. What should be our proper response to such a love given to us in Christ?

17. How does this love challenge our pride?

Summary: God's love does not originate in us or in any quality in us that would merit or attract the Love of God. His love comes from His nature, His character compels Him to love

**b. Eternal love-**

Jer. 31:3

**3 the Lord appeared to him [Israel] from far away.  
I have loved you with an everlasting love;  
therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you**

Eph 1:4-5

**4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us[b] for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,**

18. When does God begin to love us?

19. How does this inform our thinking in the midst of trials?

**c. Sacrificial love**

John 3:16

**16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.**

John 15:12-13 -

**12 “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.**

20. We mentioned before that God’s love is his determination to give of Himself to Himself and others. How has God’s love ‘acted’ according to John 3:16 and 15:12-13?

**d. Infinite love**

John 17:23, 26,

**23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.**

**26 I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”**

21. What do we learn about God’s love in Jesus' prayer for His people?

22. In what way can we connect God’s love for us to God’s trinitarian love?

1 John 3:1,

**See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.**

23. If we experience injustice, physical suffering, or emotional and relational pain, how does God’s infinite love provide comfort and instruction to us? See also John 3:16

**e. Passionate love**

Zeph 3:17 17

**The Lord your God is in your midst,**

**a mighty one who will save;  
he will rejoice over you with gladness;  
he will quiet you by his love;  
he will exult over you with loud singing.**

24. Is God's love merely a decision of His will, devoid of emotion or affection?

Luke 15:11-32

**20 And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. 23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.**

25. How does the father in this parable respond to the younger son?

26. How does the father respond to the older son?

### **Conclusion**

We see then that God's love is His perfect self giving actions toward the objects of His love. There are different degrees of His love, but all experience His love in common grace. He also acts in especially astonishing ways for His covenant people. The love we experience from God should erase any doubt about our status before God if we are in Christ. Next we will think about the implication for us in our walk with God, relationships in the family of God, and in biblical soul care.