Lesson 2 - The Love of God



It is hard for many to understand how God can save them while they are sinners. As a result, most people are running away from God out of fear. This is one way the devil, the enemy of souls, veils the good news of the gospel from mankind. For this reason, it is important for all to realize that the reason God redeemed mankind in Christ is because of His unconditional love for us, not our goodness. This is salvation by grace alone. The apostle Paul, once a persecutor of the Christian church, made this profound statement to young Timothy, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1:15).

The reason that we sinners do not need to be afraid of God and can come to Him with full confidence is because God is love. In this lesson, we are going to discover this love of God, which is the basis of our salvation. Once our eyes are opened to this fact, the gospel will become incredible good news!

1. Whom did God so love that He sent His Son to be their Savior? John 3:16

The world is the human race that has rebelled against God. Therefore, we are saved not because we deserve it or because we are good, but because God is love. This truth is the foundation to a correct understanding of the gospel.

2. What reason did Paul give why God redeemed sinners in Christ? Ephesians 2:4, 5

Although the Bible declares we are all sinners by nature and performance (see Ephesians 2:1-3), it also tells us that God's love for us is unconditional. This is indeed good news.

3. According to this text, why did God save us? Titus 3:3-5

Scripture declares that "God is love" (1 John 4:8). This love is what He is by very nature, and therefore His mercy is based on this love.

4. In the time of Christ, what were the people being taught? Matthew 5:43

The word "neighbor" here refers to fellow Jews and the word "enemy" refers to the Gentiles. Human beings know how to love one of their own, but it is difficult for us to love our enemies.

5. In contrast to this human love, how did Jesus describe Christian love? Matthew 5:44

It is this kind of love that demonstrates true Christianity to the world. Such love reflects the love God has for sinners. It is the greatest proof of the power of the gospel and the fact that we are followers of Christ (see John 13:34, 35).

6. How far-reaching is God's love? Matthew 5:45

God's love extends beyond all barriers. It is the opposite of human love. God even loves and cares for those who hate Him. God's love is therefore unconditional; it does not depend on our goodness.

7. What four conditions were we still in when God redeemed us in Christ? Romans 5:6-10

This passage tells us that while we were incapable of saving ourselves, (i.e., ungodly, still sinners, and even enemies of God), we were reconciled1 to Him through the death2 of His Son. Such love is beyond our comprehension, but it is real because God says so and demonstrated it on the cross of Christ.

1 Notice that we were reconciled to God. This is not a future, but a past event. Tremendous news!

2 Notice when/where we were reconciled, (i.e., through the cross of Christ). This will be explored further in Lessons 4 and 5.

8. How many times does the word "love" appear in the following passage? (John 21:15-17)

1 5So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love (agapao) Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love (phileo) You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." 16He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love (agapao) Me?" He said to Him,

"Yes, Lord; You know that I love(phileo) You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." 17He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love (phileo) Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love (phileo) Me?" And he said

to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love(phileo) You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep."

Our English Bibles fail to bring out the real significance of this dialogue. The English language has only one word for "love." But in Greek, the language of the New Testament, the Bible made a distinction between God's love and human love by using different words. The word Christ used was agapao3 (from the noun agape3), referring to God's kind of love that never fails. Peter's response was phileo, human affection, which is unreliable, and which led him to deny Christ three times.

9. According to the prophet Jeremiah, what draws us to God? Jeremiah 31:3

Most people are running away from God because they think He is out to punish them. But the truth is God loves us unconditionally and gave us His only Son so that none should be lost. This is what draws us to God. It is "the goodness of God that leads us to repentance" (Romans 2:4).

10. What endearing term does God use for His people? 1 John 3:1, 2

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3 The Greek verb "agapao" used in this dialogue is taken from the noun "agape." This noun appears some 87 times in the Greek New Testament and always refers to God's unconditional, unfailing, and selfless love, whereas the word "phileo" refers to human love or affection that is unreliable. Peter was grieved, not because Jesus had repeated the same question three times (as the English Bible implies), but because Jesus had switched from "agapao" to "phileo" the third time.

Not only does God love mankind unconditionally, but in His Son believers become adopted sons and daughters of God and joint-heirs with Christ. (See Romans 8:16, 17).

11. On what should we humans rely for our salvation? 1 John 4:16

Once we know and believe that God's love for us is unconditional, we can rely on Him for the assurance of salvation. And His love for us never fails. (See 1 Corinthians 13:8).

12. What does the knowledge of God's perfect love cast out? 1 John 4:17, 18

Fear of the judgment is the result of our sin problem. Because all have sinned, we are all victims to the fear of death, the wages of sin. Only the knowledge of God's redeeming love can cast out this fear.

13. What are ten things Paul mentions that cannot separate us from God's love? Romans 8:38, 39

As Christians we may have to face many hardships in this world, but our joy, peace, and hope come from knowing that nothing can separate us from the love of God. There will never come a time when God will stop loving us, because His love is unconditional and everlasting. This love, manifested in Christ and Him crucified, is our eternal hope.

How God’s Love Was Perverted, Resulting in a Perverted Gospel

In order to fully appreciate the good news of the gospel, it is important to be familiar with how Satan has perverted God’s love in order to pervert the gospel. Here is a brief history of what happened. The Greek language, in which the New Testament was originally written, had four words for love. They were (1) eros, (2) storge, (3) phileo, and (4) agape. Of these four words, eros was considered the

highest form of love. As Plato described it, eros was man seeking after God. It was the basis of all pagan religion.

The New Testament writers did not use this word eros even once. This was unacceptable to some of the Church Fathers, who became the leaders of the Christian Church after the apostles died. Some of these Church Fathers, who were of Greek origin, wanted to substitute the word eros for the word agape, the key word used in the New Testament to define God’s self-emptying, unconditional love. So began the great battle in Church history between eros and agape.

All religions based on eros love (this includes all non-Christian religions) demand that man must save himself by his own good works. This is salvation by works - legalism. In contrast, the message of the gospel tells us that God sent His Son into the world to save mankind while we were helpless, wicked, still sinners and even enemies of God (Romans 5:6-10).

It was Augustine, one of the church leaders of the fourth century, who united these two opposite kinds of love and produced a synthesis, calling it caritas. The result was a perversion of the gospel, namely, that man is saved partly by God’s grace, based on His agape love, and partly by human effort, based on human eros. This is the same heresy the false teachers tried to introduce in Galatia (see Galatians 1:6, 7; 3:1-3). This perverted gospel plunged the Christian church into what history calls the “Dark Ages.”

Thus, by modifying the true meaning of God's love, Satan managed to pervert the pure gospel from being good news to good advice -

“I must do my best and God will make up the difference.“ This is what robbed the gospel of its power. Justification or righteousness was no longer by faith alone but is obtained partly because of human effort and partly by God's grace. Following is a table showing the distinction between man's eros love and God's agape love. After that is a diagram showing how caritas perverted the gospel:

HUMAN EROS LOVE IS	GOD'S AGAPE LOVE IS
CONDITIONAL - Depends on beauty or goodness and therefore needs arousing.	**UNCONDITIONAL** - Is spontaneous, uncaused, and independent of our goodness (see Romans 5:6-10).
CHANGEABLE - Fluctuates and is unreliable (consider the divorce rate in the United States).	**CHANGELESS** - Is everlasting and never ceases (see Romans 8:35-39 and John 13:1).
SELF-SEEKING - Is egocentric, and therefore always wants to climb socially, politically, academically, economically, and even religiously.	**SELF-EMPTYING** - Is selfless, and therefore will step down for the benefit of others (1 Corinthians 13:5; 2 Corinthians 8:9; and Philippians 2:6-8).

How Caritas Perverted the Gospel

The battle between agape love and eros love in church history resulted in caritas love, a mixture of truth and error.

These 3 loves have produced 3 gospels comprising today's world religions.



Many well-intentioned Christians err by adopting a PERVERTED, CARITAS gospel, which is no gospel at all (Galatians 1:6, 7). Good works, or law-keeping, are kept in order to earn salvation, despite Scripture's clear teaching that "by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified" (Galatians 2:16).

Under the AGAPE gospel, we are saved by grace alone, and this grace is received by faith alone (Ephesians 2:8). Good works (Ephesians 2:10), motivated by God's (agape) love for us, are the fruit of the Spirit. While glorifying God, these works do not contribute one iota to our salvation; rather they evidence the salvation that is already ours in Christ (Lesson 3).

Lessons 6-12 discuss how, by faith, the gospel is made effective in the lives of believers. Later in the course (Lesson 21), good works resulting from a saving faith are once again discussed, this time in the context of the judgment of believers.

My Response to Lesson 2

• Do you believe that God's agape love for you is unconditional and that is why He saved you in Christ, even though you are a sinner who has failed to perfectly keep His law?

Response: _____

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