

The Love of God

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[0:00] Well, turn in your Bibles to Psalm 130. Psalm 130. Let me just read verse 3 and 4. Psalm 130. Let me just read verse 3 and 4. Psalm 130. Psalm 130. Let me just read verse 3 and 4. Psalm 130. Psalm 130. It says this.

If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness. Therefore, you are feared.

We have some visitors with us today. The Sunday School series we are in the middle of is on the fear of the Lord, growing in the fear of the Lord.

And so you see there in verse 4, there is that aspect of fearing God. Therefore, you are feared.

Now, you have it there. We've read it. Let me ask you, what's odd or what's strange about this verse or these verses?

What's a little bit different? Forgiveness would make us afraid. Yeah. It's this very interesting idea that it is forgiveness that results in us fearing God.

[1:24] It's forgiveness that leads to fear in our own hearts. It's God's willingness to forgive sin that invokes, that draws out what the psalmist calls fear.

Now, that tells you something about this fear of the Lord that we are talking about. What kind of things does that? What kind of things does this verse tell us about this idea of the fear of the Lord? Some ideas about that. What does it teach us about this concept? Anyone?

It's in reverence. It's reverence. Very good. What else? Okay.

That's a good idea. Who is it that, remember, who can forgive sins except for God? Ultimately, the only one who can really forgive sins is the one who all sins are really against, and that's God.

[2:30] Okay. What else? It's not to be taken lightly. Not to be taken lightly. The forgiveness of sins is not to be taken lightly. Chuck. It's an ongoing renewed fear.

My sin is ongoing renewed. Yeah. It's an ongoing experience. We don't have a one-time experience of the fear of the Lord. It's something that is ongoing.

That's good. What else? John. John. Just that his mercy in forgiving is as awesome as his wrath and punishing.

Yeah. Yeah. His mercy is as awesome and awful as his wrath and punishing. As I was going over my notes here, I was continually thinking of how sweet and awful is the place with Christ within the doors.

Where everlasting love displays the choices of the church, heaven. The places where God displays his grace.

[3:42] Two things. Two things. Two things. Two things. Two things. Sweetness. And awe. It's awful. In the sense of awe. Well, it also tells us that this concept of the fear of the Lord is broader.

It can't be reduced to terror. It can't be reduced to... It's not the fear of an escaped convict. Of someone who is guilty, has been found guilty, and is now being pursued by the law.

It's not the fear of someone who has committed a crime and now is on the run. This psalmist, the psalmist whoever this is, David I suppose, has experienced forgiveness.

He's not on the run anymore. Proverbs 28.1 says, the wicked man flees, though no one pursues him. But the righteous are as bold as a lion. Even if no one is pursuing him, a wicked man is a person who is on the run.

He's on the run from God. He's on the run from his conscience. We know God is holy. We know we are guilty, and so we are afraid. But it's not that kind of fear that Psalm 130 is talking about.

[4:57] And it's not really even that kind of fear that most of those passages that talk about the fear of the Lord are talking about. It's not the dread of divine wrath, although it appreciates the greatness and the awesomeness of God's wrath.

But it's rather gratitude for divine forgiveness that draws out what the psalmist calls fear here in Psalm 130. Now, in the last three times we've gotten together and we've talked about this subject, we've seen three aspects or three attributes, three characteristics of God that invoke fear in our hearts.

The fear that we're talking about. And the first was God's greatness. Now, what did we mean by God's greatness? God's greatness. It's how much bigger, greater, majestic God is than us. We looked at Isaiah 40, remember? And he marks off the heavens with the breadth of his hand. He holds all the waters in the hollow of his hand.

Remember we talked about you can maybe hold a teaspoon of water in your hand. God holds the oceans in his hands. Then we talked about God's holiness. God's holiness is his perfection, his moral perfection, his the perfection of his being that exalts him above all things that exalts him.

[6:37] So he's not even in the same category as we are. And last week we looked at God's wisdom. And what we said was when we see and understand that our God is wise and just how wise he is, that raises him in our estimation.

That raises him in our esteem. And so when we're walking through life and we are appreciating the wisdom of God, we're counting on it. We're saying, I don't know, but God does know.

That exalts him in our hearts. That lifts him up. And that's the fear of the Lord. So what is the fear of the Lord? Well, the fear of the Lord is our response, is our whole response to who God is, to his whole being, to his whole character.

And so it's this perfect combination of awe and gratitude. Of awe and gratitude. It's this perfect combination of joyful thankfulness and just amazement about how big God is.

And I think the thing to understand is none of these are opposites. It's not that they're pulling us in different directions, now one way, now another.

[7:52] It's that the fear of the Lord is the perfect harmony of all these things in our hearts. Where one makes the other one more beautiful.

And they make each other, they shine lights upon each other. And so the grace, the greatness, the wisdom of God joins together with his grace and his love.

And the response from our heart is what the Bible calls the fear of the Lord. Now, that's why the cross is the perfect display of God's character.

The cross is the perfect display of God's character and being. His greatness and his holiness and his majesty register when we're looking at the cross.

They weigh in. But also God's breathtaking love and mercy and even humility come in.

[8:50] And that registers as well. And so when we embrace the cross, when we believe it and when it weighs upon us, the result is fear.

It's the fear of the Lord that we're talking about. And that's why we can't be near to the cross and then just go and turn around and sin cheerfully and easily.

We really can't do that. If we ever really truly draw near to the cross, the result is we find it very difficult to sin because the spirit produces this fear that we're talking about.

And to fear the Lord is to shun evil. And so we saw that last week we quoted John Murray. And John Murray said the fear of the Lord is the soul of godliness.

The fear of the Lord is the motivating life of godliness. And I would just add this to that statement.

[9:51] That the soul of the fear of the Lord is the gospel. The motivating life of this fear of the Lord that we're talking about is the gospel.

That's why the gospel always produces changed lives. Wherever it's really believed, it changes people's lives. It puts the fear of the Lord in their hearts.

That's why there can't be such a thing as a carnal Christian. A Christian that is saved and yet doesn't care at all for godliness. Godliness, repentance is always the effect to some degree and an increasing effect.

So it's a growing effect in our lives as we believe the gospel. So the fear of the Lord is the soul of godliness. And the soul of the fear of the Lord is the gospel.

And so today we're going to look at the fourth attribute of God that evokes the fear that we're talking about. And it's God's love. God's love, his mercy, his grace.

[10:55] And we're going to look especially at the cross this morning. So turn in your Bibles to 1 John 4, verse 8.

1 John 4, 8. So we're talking about the love of God today. And this is what it says.

Well, let's just back up to verse 7. Dear friends, let us love one another. For love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God. Because God is love.

God is love. Three simple words. And yet so profound. It's not saying that God is loving. Although that is definitely true.

[11:59] I can say that about you. That you are a loving people. You show love. You demonstrate your love all the time. But only of God can we say he is love.

He is love. Now, let's just think about this differently. Let's think about it from a different angle. What would it mean? I want some answers here.

What would it mean if it said God is wrath? What would that mean? God is wrath. So what would his natural sort of state be?

Anger. Wanting to destroy. It would mean that all that he does comes from a place of wrath.

Comes from a place of wrath. When he shows wrath, he shows himself. But thankfully, the Bible doesn't say that God is wrath. He shows wrath.

[13:09] And he has wrath. And his wrath displays his holiness and his greatness. But the statement that God is love, it is going a step further than just saying this is a certain kind of characteristic that he has.

Or think of something natural. Think of the force of gravity. The force of gravity. Gravity is a force that attracts all objects in the universe to each other.

It's the attraction of everything. All physical matter to all the other physical matter in the world.

Gravity is not something that merely possesses the ability to attract.

Gravity is not something that merely attracts sometimes. Gravity is the attraction itself. Gravity is attraction. Attraction is not something it does.

Attraction is what it is. Now, God is love. It's not only what he does. But if we were to understand rightly and truly and deeply, we would see that everything that God does comes from a place of love.

[14:19] Motivated by love. Love for himself, primarily. He loves himself the most because he is the most lovable person.

And it would be right for him to love something else other than himself more. Love for each person in the Trinity. Father and Son and Spirit.

Everything each person in the Trinity does is done out of love. Love for the other persons in the Trinity. Love for his covenant people.

That's what's so wonderful about those statements about, I am your God and you are my people.

It's God's way of bringing us into the circle of his love.

So that now that just as the father is committed to love the son and do everything in love for the son. Now he's committed to love us and do everything for us.

[15:17] Hell is God's loving himself and his people. Hell is even taking, is God taking sinners seriously.

Hell is God treating sinners with the great dignity that their souls deserve as image bearers of God. It's not pleasant for sure, but it is God taking them seriously.

What I'm saying, in love he belittles no one. But, 1 John goes on, God is the originator of all love. No one has ever seen God.

In verse 7 it says, or verse 8 it says, sorry, let me see, verse 7, for love comes from God. He's the originator of it. He goes on, no one has ever seen God.

But if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is made complete in us. So, this is an amazing statement.

[16:22] First he says, no one can see God. That's true, you can't see God. But then he says, we have proof though, you can see his presence though.

We have proof of his presence. Well, how do you know if God is in a place? How can you tell if God is active in a place, in doing something there? Well, if we love one another, God lives in us.

It's God living in us that causes us to love each other. Our loving one another is proof that God lives in us, and his love is made complete in us. The love that we share here, that we have for each other, is God in us.

Is God working in us. So, you can even think of married love. Wherever a couple really loves each other, God is there, working.

Because, he said, what God has joined together, let man not separate. And marriage is a bond of love.

[17:31] The joining together is a joining together in love. So, husbands, if you love your wives, wives, if you love your husbands with real biblical love, that's God's work in you. That's God living in you.

God is love. But God's love is not some sort of inactive, just feeling, or attitude. God's love is not just some sort of mere spiritual quality.

1 John 4, 9. This is how God showed his love among us. He sent his one and only son into the world, that we might live through him. This is love.

Not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Now, God sending his son is God showing us his love.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son. God didn't let us borrow him. God didn't give him to us, but then ask for him back later.

[18:46] He really and truly gave him to us. He gave him to us to be what we needed him to be for us.

He gave him to be what we needed him to be. And what did we need him to be? What did we need to use him for? We needed an atoning sacrifice.

An atoning sacrifice. We needed him. An atoning sacrifice is a sacrifice that appeases wrath, that turns away wrath. A sacrifice that deals with God's anger and determination to punish sin.

That's what we needed him for. So wrath. Other words that the Bible uses are anger, fury, indignation. Revelation 19 shows Jesus treading out the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.

So imagine grapes getting stepped on and bursting. That's the wrath of God. Wrath is God's determination to punish sin with a vengeance.

[19:54] Vengeance. He said it is mine to repay. Vengeance is mine. And God gives us his son as an atoning sacrifice to turn away that wrath.

That's the love of God. That's the grace of God. He gave him freely to us to be everything we needed him to be for us. So think about that.

Maybe you let someone borrow your car and you really hope they don't misuse it. You really hope they take care of it. They return it to you full of gas, no scratches or dings.

And I think we would be right to expect that. If we let someone borrow something of ours, we would want it returned to us in good condition.

We wouldn't want them to misuse it. But just look at what we've put God's son to. The cross. Murder.

[20:53] Blood. Death. But it was all that God had planned beforehand should happen. It was us, but it was God giving him as an atoning sacrifice.

But it says more. Think about it. It says God's one and only son. It echoes Abraham and Isaac, doesn't it? Genesis 22.

Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.

I've been thinking a lot about Abraham and Isaac. Abraham and Sarah waited a long time for Isaac. 25 years at least.

They waited, and they waited on the Lord. And when you wait upon the Lord, your hope grows, your expectation grows, the preciousness of the gift grows.

[22:00] And those who wait on the Lord, they don't wait in vain. They couldn't do anything to get a son. Abraham was old as old could be. Sarah was barren. And so they waited for God to act, and they waited for 25 years.

And at long last he came, Isaac. It means laughter. God had filled their mouths and their hearts with laughter. And now God comes along and says, take your son, your only son.

And when Hebrews brings the scene up, it makes the connection even more emphatic. Take your one and only son. Slay him.

Burnham is a sacrifice for me. But it's not just his one and only son. It's the son whom you love. God knew the depths of Abraham's love for Isaac.

And it's as if God wanted Abraham to experience the pain as deeply as possible. He wanted him to feel the trial as deeply as possible.

[23:09] Two times in the New Testament, God's voice came from heaven and it said, this is my son whom I love. Why do you even have to say whom I love?

If you have a son, you love him. But if you really, really love him, you have to say, this is the son whom I love. So Abraham's love for his long awaited Isaac was a shadow of God's love for his son. But Isaiah 53 says, God himself laid our sins on Christ. God did that. Second Corinthians says, God himself made him who had no sin to be sin for us.

That's the amazing love of God. And that's why there is forgiveness. The Isaiah 30, where we started. And really, that's why this forgiveness is such an awesome, fearful thing.

That when we grasp it, our hearts fear. There is forgiveness with you. Therefore, you are feared. It's like we needed a new heart.

[24:21] We were in desperate condition. We needed a new heart. And God tears out his own son's heart and gives it to us. And then he comes to us with his heart and his hands dripping with blood.

And we would say, you don't have to do that. I'm not worthy of that. But he looks at you with this sun-blazing intensity and says, I love you.

And I want you to have this. Well, that kind of love and that kind of grace, it's like it's too much. It's amazing when you really think about it.

So do you see there is something fearful and terrifying and holy and sacred about God's love for us. God doesn't love like we do. God loves like God loves. And he loves with a height and a depth and a breadth and a length of God.

[25:28] He loves with the intensity of God. And he loves with all of his being and he loves with all that he is. And that's why God loves God loves people in a million ways.

If you look around, God is loving people in a million ways. But God said, but Paul said, God demonstrates his own, his own kind of love, his own brand, his own quality of love for us in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The cross was the only prism it was the only glass that God's love could actually display the fullness of it. The cross was the only lens that could hold the full radiance of God's love.

And that's why we have to remember it again and again. And that's why the cross does us so, so much good. And that's why we love singing songs about the cross. And that's why we love remembering the cross.

And that's why a gospel message about the cross, it does us good. Even if we've heard it a thousand times, it's because it's there that like the full force, the full power of God's love comes to us.

[26:40] Now, it's not just the father's love, it's the son's love. 1 John 3.16, this is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.

So, the son didn't go dragging and kicking on his way to the cross. He laid down his life. He volunteered his life. He knew the use that we were going to put him to.

He knew what he was going to. And he came. He gave himself to us. So, the son, he's the second person of the Trinity. And so, just as true as God is love, the father is love, the son is love, it's true that he is love just as the father is love.

And so, he took upon himself our nature and he suffered in our place on the cross because of his love for us. And it was 100% all in, nothing held back, all of his being love for us.

So, who gave the son? Well, the father gave the son. Well, who gave the son? Well, he gave himself away. And we could even say the spirit.

[27:56] The spirit is love and he loves us. In 1 John 4, 13, it says, we know that we live in him and he in us because he has given us of his spirit.

Right? 1 John 4 is all about love. It's about God living in us, love in us, and then right here in the middle of it is the spirit.

He's there. He's the way God's love lives in us. Through his grace and his power is the reason we can love one another.

The spirit of God is the fullness of God's love. Verse 12, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. And now it says he lives in us because he has given us of his spirit.

So God, the spirit, is the transporter, the means of how God's love lives in us. He's the one that sheds abroad the love of God in our hearts.

[29:00] Now, have you ever played that? You play the game telephone and the message gets passed person to person and by person and then when it gets to the end, the message is all garbled and changed.

Well, there's no message lost when God the Father sends us his love because he sends it to us by his spirit and the spirit perfectly conveys, perfectly pours out.

Nothing is lost in transmission to our hearts because he himself, the spirit, is love and he is all in this.

or you can think of another illustration. Let's suppose you have a message you want to give to someone. Would you want to send that message with someone who doesn't like you and who doesn't think the way you think?

Or would you want that message to go with someone who thinks like you and believes like you? Because what will happen if that person doesn't like you I'm saying the person that you give the message to, your messenger, he doesn't like you, he doesn't believe in the message, he doesn't think you're right, how is that message eventually going to come across?

[30:20] It's going to be all mixed up and garbled. It's like a salesman who doesn't believe in his product. He's not going to do well because he wouldn't himself buy it.

Well, the Holy Spirit is the perfect person who he loves us. So he is glad to give God's love, to shed abroad God's love in our hearts.

He is glad to show forth the Son's love for us because he himself loves us. So, back to the cross, was the Spirit there at the cross?

Did the Spirit have his hand in the cross? Hebrews 9.14 says that Christ offered himself through the eternal Spirit to God to cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death.

The Father was there. The Son was there. And the Spirit was there. The Spirit was the conveyor, the means of the Son offering himself to the Father.

[31:31] Father. The cross was the exercise of the Son's full love for his Father. When he said, not my will, but your will be done, he was loving his Father.

And when he was laying down his life for the people that his Father gave him, he was loving his Father. He was upholding the glory of his Father. He was displaying the wisdom of his Father. The cross was the Son's way of saying, this much I love you, Father.

So who can convey such a great love? Well, only the Spirit could. And then the Spirit sustained the Son. The Spirit upheld the Son so the Father could strike him.

The Spirit said, this much I love these people. I will hold up the Son. I will bear him in my arms to the place of sacrifice. Then I will take the full love of Christ and present it to the Father.

So the Spirit was there when the darkness descended and God's wrath fell. And the Spirit was saying, I will save these people. And it's the Spirit himself who comes into our hearts.

[32:42] He's the one who, after we hear the gospel, he sheds abroad the love of God in our hearts. We're blind, we're dark, we don't see it, there's no glory in the cross, and then one day the lights come on.

The Holy Spirit begins to show us the love of God. He pours it out on us, and he takes that love, and he testifies to our hearts that we are the children of God. We're adopted, and by him we cry, Abba, Father.

The same Spirit that lived in Christ lives in us, so we would dare to say with Jesus Christ, Abba, Father. And we would feel the same rights and the same access to the same relationship that the Son has to the Father.

And so we are sons of God, heirs of God, and co-heirs with Christ. And so this fear that we are talking about in this class is the respect and the awe of a son for his father.

It's the fear of a creature in the presence of his great, holy, wise God, and it's the fear that comes from forgiveness. forgiveness. It's a fear that comes from love to being having been loved so much.

[33:58] And God's love doesn't diminish him in our sight. And when we get a taste of that love, we wouldn't dare sin against it or use it as an excuse to sin.

No, there's forgiveness with you, therefore you are feared. That he would forgive me, that he would welcome me into his family, that he would pour out his love into my heart.

It doesn't fill me with, oh, now look what I can get away with. It fills me with admiration. So, as we end, how do we grow in this fear?

Well, how do we live in it? And I think the answer is this. We're going to be talking about this more, but I want to give you something. How do you live in this?

The answer, I think, is that we continue to live in Christ. We continue to live upon the cross. We continually go back to that.

[34 : 58] We continually live on what the cross won for us. We live in the love of God. Romans 5, 1 says, therefore, since we are justified through faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

So God isn't after you, Christian, like a bounty hunter. No one is chasing you to punish you. No one is after you to afflict you.

There is peace with God. And so live in that peace. Enjoy that peace. and enjoy and count all that Christ has won for you.

And then stay in God's love. And what I mean by that is, if that is where you are positionally, if that is where you are legally, then make every effort to stay there in your life relationally in an ongoing sense.

1 John 3, 24, those who obey his commands live in him. So you want to live in this love? You want to stay in that felt security of his love?

[36 : 13] You want to live there? Well, obey his commandments. Keep that fellowship open and flowing. Don't grieve the spirit. Don't quench the spirit, but maintain communion.

But it's more than that. It's living as living in Christ is living as a child of God. Continually remind yourself, he is my father, I am his son.

It's his to lead me. It's his job to care for me. One thing we have to tell Cayman over and over and over again, and it's hard for him to get this into his head, but one thing we have to tell him over and over again is be the kid.

Don't try to be the parent, be the kid. don't worry about being in charge. You don't need to figure out what the right thing, the best thing.

You don't need to control the situation. You don't need to make sure that people are doing what they're supposed to be doing. You just need to trust mom and dad. You need to relax and just be the kid.

[37 : 23] that's what we all need to learn how to do. To do with our father. To say, you know what?

He knows best. He loves me. I don't have to worry about a hundred different problems. I just need to stay close to my father. I need to stay close to Jesus. So how do you grow in the fear of God?

Well, believe it or not, it's by learning to grow more and more in the sense of he loves me. He cares for me. He means to do me good. He can take care of me.

And the more we do, the more we remain in his love, the more we grow in our appreciation of just how big he is, how he's enough. He can take care of things, just how holy he is, how wise he is, and yes, how much he loves us.

Well, let's pray and then we'll be dismissed. Heavenly Father, we do ask that you would please help us, that you would please help us to remain in your love, to keep short accounts with you, when we have sinned, not to wait, but to go right away and confess our sin, right when we've got off the path, to get back on the path where we came off.

[38 : 51] And we ask that you would remind us again that it was you who told us that if you, if your brother sins against you 70 times, seven times to go and forgive him, to forgive him when he comes to you, that your heart is a heart of forgiveness.

forgiveness, you have to teach us to be forgiving. It's not that you are reluctant. Will you please remind us of those things and help us to stay in your love when we are in difficult trials and difficult situations, to remember that you are our father and we don't have to be the mom or the dad in the situation, but we can take your hand and walk with you and stay close to you.

I ask that you would help us to do that by the spirit. In Jesus' name, amen.