

The God of Love

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[0:00] Would you turn with me please to Ephesians. Now, I used New King James this morning and I'm using New American Standard Bible this evening. I hope you don't mind keep moving around. Ephesians and chapter 3.

! I will read from verse, let me get my chapter, okay. I'm just going to read the last few verses, really, from verse 14 of Ephesians and chapter 3.

From verse 14. For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do exceedingly, abundantly, beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

We used to sell, and I'm not sure if we've still got books in our bookroom, which are entitled, How Can a God of Love Send People to Hell?

[1:58] It's by a man called John Benton in England. And how do we answer someone who asks that sort of question? How can a God of love send people to hell?

There are those who do not think he is a God of love. Others would say that there's no real hell. Everybody's going to heaven anyway. And some of the sloppy sort of entertainment we get of all about heaven and what comes out, these sort of films that they speak of about those things. Well, let's try and answer this question. The question really, what is God like? Well, he is a God who is love.

There's great emphasis upon this, of course, by many, but they have a wrong idea of the love of God. It's a sloppy sort of sentimental love.

But the Bible very clearly teaches that God is a God who loves. And I want us just this evening and this evening hour to look at that in some small measure if we can.

[3:06] And if we can in some way try and comprehend, as it were, something of the love of God. We are so small, we are so feeble, it is very difficult for us indeed to grasp the greatness of our God.

Remember in the first letter of John, of course, he speaks about God being love. For example, chapter 4, verse 8. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

The problem is that's such a wonderful truth that people twist it. God is love, so he'll understand when I sin because that's what I do.

He will forgive me and everything just automatically because he's a God of love. God is a God of love, so therefore he doesn't really punish the sinner.

God is a God of love, so there cannot be any hell. There's a wrong idea there of what love is. God's love is strong. God's love is good.

[4:11] God's love is righteous. Because of this, a very attribute of God that he is love, we must never understand. He's different from all his other attributes.

We must put this understanding about God together with all the rest that the scriptures tell us about him. He's a God who is holy.

So holy that the angels hide their faces. You think of that great chapter of Isaiah 6. The cherubim cover their faces crying, holy, holy, holy.

And we cannot even try to enter into the meaning of God's holiness. Because we are sinners by nature. God is righteous, so good.

Absolutely righteous. He does not sin. He cannot sin. He is righteous. And he's a God of justice. [5:10] Absolute justice. Complete justice. Everything he does is right in his decisions. He's not like some feeble lawyer or judge here on earth.

He's a just judge. He's a just person. He's full of justice. But the Bible also speaks, and many, many don't like this when they read Romans chapter 1 and chapter 2 through there, that he's a God of wrath.

He's wrath, full of wrath and anger against wickedness and sin. So he cannot separate his love from all that he is and all that the Bible tells us about God.

And we could go on and look at all the various attributes of God. And it's a wonderful thing to do. As we begin to try and grasp in some measure with our feeble little minds, something of the greatness and wonder and glory of our God.

So this is God. God's love is not against his justice or his holiness or his righteousness. No at all. And so Paul, indeed here, prays for the Ephesians.

[6:25] And he says that God would grant you according to the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, and you being rooted and grounded, rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend, may begin to try and understand with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge.

Knowledge surpasses knowledge. Greater than anything we can try, really understand or know. Surpasses our knowledge. That you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

How difficult for us, with our little minds, to begin to understand. So let's take these four words, the breadth of the love of God, if we can and try and, in one way, is it right that we try and dissect God in any way, but if we need to look at scripture, and we need to try and understand all that it means. The breadth of the love of God. It gives us so much. We talk about his grace, and his grace to all men, because it's common grace.

Remember, the Lord Jesus speaks in the Sermon on the Mount, in chapter 5, 45, that he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

[8:04] I'm sure you've got farmers nearby. Some may be wicked men, and some may be very good men, but when it rains, it usually doesn't just rain on the farm of the good man, and the other doesn't get the rain.

No, it rains. God gives rain to the farmers. Yes, he gives it to all. And then, of course, as we look around this earth and this world, and some of us, you know, you go to some of the wonderful sights, the wonderful views that we have.

We often take people in the Philippines out to a great escarpment. It's almost 2,000 feet up, and then you look down into actually a large crater, which was a volcano at one time, miles across, and in the centre's little island with actually an active volcano still in it.

And if it's a clear day or it's just been raining, there's a marvellous view to really see this great scene. And you see something of the beauty around you.

Or let me look at a flower, a lovely flower in the springtime, and who can make a flower like that? Or they try and do it out of plastic and other things.

[9:15] But who can make a wonderful flower with all its colour and all its glory? How good, how beautiful, how lovely things are, such as this, the beauty of the earth.

And look what God gives us. And oh, I know some have not experienced this, but how we experience the love of our families, our wives and children and parents and others.

Oh yes, the loved ones. There are churches, there are denominations, which deny that God loves the non-elect. They deny common grace.

In some ways, I think it's right to call them possibly hyper-Calvinist in that. But they deny all common grace. God hates the wicked and loves the elect, that's all.

And they just pass that off completely. But I don't believe that really is the teaching of Scripture. It certainly wasn't what Lord Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, when he talks about the rain and the sun on the fields of all.

[10:23] And why is it this? God's love to all. Why is it that we are not consumed? Why is it that God has not just poured out his fire on this wicked world?

Well, you know how Peter writes, does he not? Because this is his grace. And Peter writes, the Lord is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance. And we have to take those words at its face value, that there is a patience in God, that there is this call to repentance, the men and women and boys and girls.

And God is patient, been patient for thousands of years. He has not cast us off. He's not destroyed this world yet. He's still here. And this is still the day of salvation.

There still is this. For all of each and every one of us, boys and girls and men and women here tonight, there is God's patience for you and me. And we are not consumed because of God's love.

[11:28] We're not consumed because of our sin. Yes, because God restrains sin as well. This world is not as wicked as it could be. It is very wicked. And we read all the time.

And we have things coming across to us on television and radio of wickedness that goes on here and there. But do you think if God withdrew his hand in any way, how wicked this world could be? Now, I don't agree with all that C.S. Lewis wrote. He was a high sacramentalist in his views.

But he was a great writer. And he wrote a book called *The Great Divorce*. And he pictures hell as such as a great city, black and dark, and everybody doing all their wicked deeds to each other.

A horrendous thing. Horrendous. But now we're not constrained. We're here. His love for God is here, isn't it?

[12:34] Everybody's not as bad as they could be. God is restraining sin. Otherwise, we would have been throwing atom bombs and hydrogen bombs at each other already. But God has restrained it.

And he's called upon us as Christians to preach the gospel to every creature. This is his love. This is his grace. And we go forth and we proclaim Christ as the Savior of sinners.

Not just of Jews. Although they thought the Messiah was for them. Even in the early church, some of the Jews did not think that the gospel was for Gentiles.

But it's for all types of people. It's for all nations of the world, is it not? Because we're all the same. Whatever the color of our skin, wherever we grew up, whatever our background, we are all sinners needing the grace of God.

All stratas of society. Not just the rich, nor just the poor. The high, the low, the intelligent, the almost stupid, yes.

[13:39] The unintelligent. But we all need the Lord Jesus Christ. And the Lord forgives sin in his love.

B.B. Warfield, a great theologian, lived a hundred years ago. One of his sermons on John 3.16 is very, very well worth reading.

Because sometimes we have the wrong idea, wrong understanding of John 3.16. When for God so loved the world. And what he says in that sermon, when we think of the world, many people have grown up in certain churches and others, when they think of the world, they think of all people in the world.

And he says, that's not really the meaning. God so loved this wicked world. This is how he puts it. This wicked world. He still loves it.

That means us in this wicked world. In all that we do. He still, there's a love there. For God so loved the world. This is wickedness and even in that way.

[14:48] Just as a parent who loves their wayward child. Although they hate the sin of that child. They still love their child. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.

Because this is a wicked world. That's why God gave his only begotten son. That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Oh yes. This is what it is. Once men thought that men were getting better. You know this, we've been, a lot have been words at the moment about Darwin, and evolution, and everything else.

And do you know at the end of the 19th century, into the beginning of the 20th century, all these people were thinking, the world is going to get better and better now, and man can solve its own problems, and this is it.

We're evolving, and man are becoming better. And then all the millions died in the trenches of the First World War. The terrible warfare there in France and Belgium.

[16:02] I was telling some people, I used to have four aunts. All of them were spinsters, because all of them had fiancés who died in the trenches of the First World War.

Man getting better. The millions who died. We think about Buchenwald and Auschwitz. The wickedness of man to man.

Darwinism. Man getting better. The wickedness of men's hearts, and it comes out, and you get it coming over in our news all the time, do we not?

Oh yes, God is a God of wrath against sin. And it is in many ways. You wonder about all the things that have been taking place as God is speaking to us.

All the disasters that come. They're not by accident. Our God is in control of this world. And as he speaks speaking to men and women about our sin.

[17 : 05] But do you remember that no sin is too great, that God cannot forgive us. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do, crucifying the Lord of glory.

He covers all our needs. And what does Peter say? He says, let's cast all our anxieties, all our cares upon him. He cares for you.

He loves us. And even the hairs of our head are numbered. And he knows every sparrow that falls in the street. This is our God.

The breadth of his love. The length of his love. His love is eternal. It never changes. He loved the children of Israel. Yes, this is it.

Because he loved them. They weren't better than any other nation in any way. But he set his love upon them. There was nothing in them. It was only his eternal purpose for the Israelites.

[18 : 06] that God was with them. There's nothing in us. There's no reason why you and I, who are Christians tonight, what we should be Christians, because we are different to someone else, or better than someone else.

It's all because of his love. His eternal love. And how that you marvel. And we just don't understand. Chosen from before the foundation of the world in the Lord Jesus Christ.

in the opening verses of this letter to the Ephesians. Elect from the foundation. The covenant love of God. But you see, one of the wonderful things, and why we know that there is a trinity.

How could there be a God who is just one person? How could there be? Because from all eternity, he would be this.

There's no beginning or end with God. He's from everlasting until everlasting. And before there was any creation, how could God love? If there wasn't a trinity. But there is love within the persons of the Godhead.

[19 : 12] Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That's why God is the God of love. Therefore, there must be a trinity. There must be more to this whole teaching of concerning God and who he is.

Because he loves. Within the persons of the Godhead, there is love. Pure, absolute love. And anybody who denies the trinity denies that God is love.

Because how could he just become that? God doesn't change. He's unchangeable. He's always been love. The eternal love of God.

The length of the love of God. This is God. And he's ceaseless. He never changes. He's ceaseless in obtaining his object, his purposes.

In redemption. It's a certain redemption. It's not a possibility that he opens up and says, well, it's up to you. You can come in if you want to or something. No.

[20 : 12] God is a God who seeks the lost. The parable of the lost sheep. He's the one who goes in Christ and seeks indeed the lost and he brings the lost home.

This is the love of God. Calling the good shepherd, searching. And God enters into fellowship with man and it's his beginning. He starts it.

He does everything. He works it out. It's his purposes. And we are told very much so that nothing, nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Those last verses of Romans 8. Nothing, whatever it is, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Oh yes, dear friends.

We can't really begin to understand and marvel. His love is endless in duration. It continues forever. It is everlasting love.

[21 : 12] Jeremiah writes in chapter 31 and verse 3, the Lord appeared to him from afar saying, I have loved you with an everlasting love. Therefore I have drawn you with loving kindness.

This is our God. That's what, if we are Christians tonight, that's what he's done. He's loved us from before the foundation of the world and has drawn us unto himself.

And it's not because of anything in you or me. He's a God of love. Oh yes. And he's so long-suffering with our sins, with our waywardness, with our lack of love in return, our failures, and all that we do.

How long-suffering our God is. Remember that story in Hosea, of Hosea and this prostitute he takes as his wife, Goma, and how she goes off and how he takes her back.

Why? Because he's to echo the love of God towards Israel. Such a wayward people. And it returns to us. We are so often so wayward.

[22 : 27] How often we've sinned against our great God. We've failed our Lord Jesus Christ. We haven't pleased him as we do. We live so often selfishly and for ourselves.

But he loves us still. Oh yes. Endless. And the forgiveness of God. When the Lord Jesus Christ answers this question of the disciples, to forgive 70 times 7.

Oh, we've been more than 70 times 7 that we go to him and we come with the same sins so often again and again and ask his forgiveness. And we know he does forgive.

If we confess our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And he does.

Because he's a God of love. He's unchanging. His love is constant. It's not fickle. It's not something which wanes one day and grows another and disappears and goes away.

[23 : 31] It's a constant love. But God is love. It's boundless. It never comes to any end. No. We can know God's love.

It's always there. When we go to him, we go to a loving heavenly father. We go to our Lord Jesus who loved us even unto the death, the death of the cross.

And even when we sin, that love is not forfeited. It doesn't change. The depth of the love of God is incomprehensible.

We can't understand it. And it says here, Paul says this, we can't understand. How God can lower himself to our level.

In Christ, he came into this world. This is the Lord Jesus Christ. We see him. We see the birth of Christ. Born, laid in a manger.

[24 : 36] Becoming man. Oh, coming into this wicked, sinful world. Oh, you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. That though he was rich, yet for your sake, he became poor.

That you through his poverty might become rich. He left the glory of heaven. He came into this wicked world. He walked here. And what did they do to him?

They scoffed at him. They denied him. They didn't receive him. So many rejected him, laughed at him, spat upon him in the end. And then they took him and they crucified the Lord of glory.

This is a hymn. And suffered such shame. The penalty for our sin. He did it. Why? Because of love. Because of love to you and I. What love to such wicked, pitiful creatures as us. the height of God's love.

[25 : 45] We're taken and we, we're joined to Christ. We are in Christ, as Paul says, a mystery of this oneness with Christ.

We're taken and we're made and adopted into the family of God. And he becomes our father. And we cry, Abba, Father. And the Lord Jesus is with us.

Sinners like us, in fellowship with the living God. Oh yes. And as Paul can write in this letter, that we are seated, as it were, even now, in the heavenly places with Jesus Christ.

We're raised up with him. Seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. So that in the ages to come, he might show the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

and we want, what does it all mean? We can't even grasp it really. Something of the wonder of it. And it's all because of his love to you and I, dear Christian.

[26 : 50] Love like this can never be fully understood. And I think it will take us all eternity to try and understand something of the love of God.

God. I think there will be something every day that we will be learning more of the wonder and the glory of our great God. That he love you and I.

The love of God to you and I. Why then does God, the God of love, send people to hell? God surely could save everyone in the world.

If salvation is all of grace, he could save everyone. Why doesn't he? I don't know. I don't know. There's no answer really to this.

Why does he save one and pass by as it were another? Why is it? Why is there a universe?

[27:56] Why did he make everything? I don't know. Do you? He has no need of anything. He is God. He's absolutely complete and perfect in himself.

He didn't need us. There's no need for us. He has no needs because he's God. Why did God make a universe like this?

Why did he make this world a little planet going around this sun and all the stars and all the minds boggle when the astronomers tell the distances and everything to galaxies and everything else?

We don't understand and they come up with all sorts of theories and all sorts of things but they don't really understand. They don't know. With our puny little tiny minds we cannot even begin to grasp the greatness of God and I think the very universe is to show something of how God is so great and we are a little we're not even specks are we on a little planet going around the sun.

Why did he make all the people of this world? I don't really know. Why did he allow sin to come in?

Why did he create Adam and Eve with that potential to fall into sin?

[29:15] Why? He did. Why does he bother with us? Why did he provide salvation for you and I? Why did he send Jesus?

Why did Christ come for us to save us from our sins? Well it's love but why did he love us? There's nothing in us to attract anybody.

We are sinners, rebels, wicked by nature. Why have some heard the gospel and others never heard of it?

Why did God permit Islam to dominate many great areas of the world and people never have heard of the truth of Jesus Christ?

Why for centuries there's been no, there was no gospel for ancestors here, for the Native Americans, for our ancestors who came probably from Europe and other places and before when the Jews had God and knew of God in Europe, pagans, worshipping idols and everything else.

[30:27] Back in our history and our ancestry. Why? I don't know. I don't know. Don't know at all. The only answer is God has willed it and God is a God of love.

I have to grasp that and I, my puny, tiny, little mind, I don't know. But because I know who He is, I trust Him that everything He does is right and good and is a God of love.

The Lord Jesus prayed like this in Luke chapter 10 and verse 21. I praise you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you've hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.

Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in your sight. And this is it. For the greatest minds this world has ever known cannot begin to fathom the greatness and the wonder and the purposes of God.

What He's revealed is revealed here in the Word of God, His Scriptures. And you know, I always come back to Abraham, to Abraham outside of Sodom and Gomorrah.

[31:53] We come there to those wicked cities, Sodom and Gomorrah. They're down there and the angel and in fact God Himself in that Theophany, what's coming there and tells Abraham what he's about to do with Sodom and Gomorrah.

And Abraham begins to intercede and he says, suppose there are fifty righteous men in that city.

And Abraham says this in Genesis 18, 25, far be it from you to do such a thing to slay the righteous with the wicked so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike.

Far be it from you shall not the judge of all the earth do right. And that, those words, shall not the judge of all the earth, we know He will.

He does right. And I've had to tell that to numerous people over the years. As you stand by this little coffin this long, and you say to this grieving parent who's lost their little child, shall not the judge of all the earth do right?

Of course He will. You and I can't understand. We don't know with our little minds. But God is so great and He's a God of love.

[33:31] Trust Him. Trust Him. Never doubt it. Why are you and I a believer today? Because of God's love and God's mercy and God's grace and God's goodness.

God demonstrates His own love towards us in the while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

And there are many things that God brings to us, does He not? In His providence, in His wisdom, difficulties and experiences, yet God is good.

oh, so many things. The writers of the Hebrews writes in those opening verses of chapter 12, consider Him as Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

Consider Him who endured such hostility of sinners against Himself so that you may not grow weary and lose heart or faint in your minds as some of the other versions refer to it.

[34 : 39] We're to consider Jesus. He suffered and there is suffering in this world and you and I know it and some have to suffer more than others and you wonder about it.

I have a dear friend in England and his wife is slowly dying of multiple sclerosis. He's had to give up what he's been doing and he's now full time looking after his dear wife.

We had at Wattisham with dear Gordon Hawkins. We have a couple not very educated people, ordinary, simple people and they had two sons.

One after the other were born with a disease which was genetic that they would not live longer than about 16 or 17 years of age.

They had one son and they had to begin pushing him around in a wheelchair and he grew very fat and big. They had to lift him into the bath to bath him.

[35 : 45] They had to do all the things for him in the toilet and everything and bring him to church and he smiled and he became a Christian and died about the age of 16 or 17.

But while he got to the age of about 9 or 10 they had another boy exactly the same as that and they knew what was ahead of them. We never found them complaining.

But why? What such trial they were called upon to go through? Is God a God of love? He is. And he uses these things even in our lives.

They're so difficult and some of us have not experienced anything like some people are caused to go through. A wife dying of cancer and the husband cannot do anything to alleviate the pain and the sorrow.

These things we go through and we went why God? Why me? Why does this happen? But we have to trust and Satan will come upon us and say in a whisper in our ears he doesn't love you he's neglected you there is really no God he's a hateful person and we have to put and say get behind me Satan God does care I don't understand but I know that waits me is glory and there will be no more crying and pain and he will wipe away every tear from our eyes I know that because he said he will and we trust him and one day we are to be like God no not with the greatness of power another one but we are to be like him and we are to seek to be like him now we are to love and in glory there will be no sin and we shall be perfect and like him in his perfection of holiness yes we are to read 1 Corinthians 13 and see what love true love is in that great chapter we are to love our neighbours as ourselves we are even to love our enemies we are to love one another the church is to be an example to others of love because God is love they may see that we love one another by this they shall know that you are my disciples if ye have love one to another this is it and there is a test upon this love and it comes

[38 : 19] I am sure it comes to every one of us from time to time and perhaps today love God is a God of love always hold on to that whatever takes place whatever happens to you and I he is a God who loves us and dear Christian he loves you he loves you because he sent his son to die for you but dear believers the Bible also says there are some people who are unbelievers and it says that God hates the workers of iniquity oh dear no delight in the death of the wicked we are not wishing he says we are not wishing that any should perish but come to repentance but is there some here tonight I don't know you some here tonight who have never turned from their sin and trusted in God perhaps in your heart you are rebellious against him because you don't believe he is really loving because of something that has happened in your past there is something which has been so painful you don't even want to think about it but you will not repent and you will not relieve of your sin you will not turn from it whatever happens but you must dear friend you must come to him these are God of love and if you come bearing your sin and saying

I'm a sinner forgive me that old hymn nothing in my hands I bring no we have nothing we can come we don't deserve anything we come with sinful hearts we come nothing we don't deserve anything but come to his cross the cross of Jesus and hold on to him but many reject the love of God many reject it rejection of infinite love and purity do not reject the love of God do not reject him because without him you're lost and undone and he says there is a hell there is a hell prepared all for all wicked sinners who do not repent of their sins dear friends turn from your sin turn to him admit you're a sinner and trust in him trust in the Lord Jesus he will forgive he will receive because he's a God of love and he promises that sinners he will receive who come in repentance and faith to him

let us pray how gracious God we thank you tonight that you indeed are a God of love oh it's marvelous in our eyes that you could love us such as us who've sinned so much who do think so many things who are so wicked that we would be ashamed if even our closest loved ones even knew about so much that we've done and thought oh our gracious God you love us because you know us in and out there's nothing hidden from your sight and we thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ that he came into the world to save us from our sins we thank you and bless you and worship you and glorify you bless us we need plead tonight and now to him who's able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works within us to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever amen may may may