

# WHERE DID LOVE GO?

I have been perplexed and concerned over the past few years concerning a trend that has been growing within the Body of Christ. We find something lacking in sermons and preaching. We find it lacking in much of the contemporary music and worship that is being brought forth. We find it lacking in mega-ministries on their multi-media television and internet outlets. I am

concerned that what has been ever so slowly and subtly becoming less and less expressed is the love of God. Now I know that may seem to be an odd thing to say. After all, isn't that what God is all about? And that is exactly my point.

Now I know that what I am about to say may offend some of us. However, please, give me an opportunity to explain what I mean. The trend that we have been inundated with is the wonderful aspect of God known as His grace. God's grace is one of the fundamental aspects of God's character. It expresses God's great favor towards His most precious creation. It also expresses the ability that has been given to the born again child of God to walk in and live out the Christ like lifestyle that every child of God is now in possession of because of what Jesus did for us 2000 years ago. I want to make it very clear that I am not opposed to teaching and understanding the grace of God. What I am saying is that if we spend so much of our efforts in this one aspect of God's character, or for that matter any other single aspect of God's character, without putting them in context concerning the fullness of who God is, we tend to miss out on much, much more concerning God and His relationship with us and our relationship with Him.

The Apostle Paul warned the church that was in Rome to not misunderstand this aspect of God's character of grace.

*"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"* Romans 5:19-6:2 (KJV)

There were some in the Roman church that misunderstood the aspect of God's grace. They used it as a license to sin more because it would prove and allow God's grace to be poured out upon them even more. To that Paul gives a resounding, *"God forbid."* Unfortunately, this same erroneous thinking concerning God's grace has crept into the Body of Christ today, as well. I believe this erroneous and inordinate way of thinking concerning God's grace has been ever so subtly allowed to enter into the Body of Christ. This is because of what has been ever so subtly not expressed, taught less and less and many times simply taken for granted within the Body of Christ – and that is that God **IS** love.

We must try to grasp the understanding that love is not simply just one of the aspects of God's character and nature. It is who **He is**. The scriptures are very clear. 1John 4:8 states very clearly, *"He that loveth not knoweth not God; for **God is love.**"* 1John 4:16 again states it very clearly, *"And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. **God is love;** and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."* Love is the very essence that God chooses to express the fullness of who He is. It is expressed in the most well known scripture of the Bible as found in John 3:16 – *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."* The scripture does not say for God so "graced" the world that he gave His only begotten Son even though "grace" is a vital aspect in the salvation process..

We must grasp the fact that love is who God is. It is not just an aspect of God's nature and character. Everything else we read throughout the scriptures concerning God's nature and character stem from the very fact that God **IS** love. Grace and His longsuffering towards us are given and experienced because God **IS** love. Mercy and forgiveness are given and experienced because God **IS** love. A restored relationship back with God is given and experienced because God **IS** love. Jesus did what He did because God **IS** love. We must also fully understand that everything God does is because He **IS** love. We must understand and grasp the fact that **ALL** of God's attributes are in no way in conflict with Him being love. His justice, His wrath and His holiness are all in perfect unity with Him being love. Actually the very fact that God is a "just" God actually amplifies greatly the fact that God is love.

Through Adam's disobedience and lack of trust in God and what God had told him, sin entered the world. Sin brought separation from God and spiritual death to Adam and every one of His offspring and descendents, all Mankind, including you and I. The scriptures tell us that God's justice demanded sentence be invoked upon all of Adam's descendents. That sentence was death, spiritual death, which is to be eternally separated from God, as well as an eternity spent in a place called Hell. Here is where the fact that God is love comes into the picture. God had set a plan in motion, even before the creation of the earth. The plan was that Jesus was the Lamb slain (for the remission of all our sin) even before there was an earth; even before Adam was created. Revelation 13:8 tells us, *"And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."* 1Peter 1:19-20 tells us this also, *"But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you..."*

God had a plan in motion to pour out His love to what would be His most precious of all creation even before they were created. He knew man would sin. Being a God who is just, He knew that this would call for justice and punishment because *"the wages of sin is death."* (Romans 6:23) Therefore, His awesome love set in motion a plan of redemption even before it happened. God being love made a way of restoring a breached relationship before it was even breached. He knew that justice would need to be served so He established a way that the guilt of all man's sin would be satisfied through the atoning blood of the Lamb, thereby declaring man not guilty and acquitting man of all guilt from sin.

This is love in action. God, who is love, chose to pour out His divine favor, His grace, upon sinful man. However, we must understand that grace alone would not have completed the redemption process on its own. If someone is in need, showing favor to them and thinking nice things about them and not looking down upon that person in their need is wonderful. However, thinking well of that person doesn't necessarily get that person out of their need. There needs to be something more. There needs to be an action that truly expresses that heartfelt favor (grace).

God's heart of love bestowed His Divine favor (grace) upon all men. The action needed was to bring forth His mercy. Mercy is the action of seeing a need and then actually doing something to meet that need. God, who is love, bestowed His Divine favor – His grace. His grace saw the need of sinful man who was lost in sin. Instead of abandoning man in his sin, God bestowed his Divine favor. God then did something to meet the need of man being eternally separated from Him. He poured out His mercy in the form of His Son, Jesus, the Lamb slain before the foundation of the earth, to be the final sacrifice and satisfy God's justice upon sinful man. The apostle Paul in Romans 5:8 expressed it this way, *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."*

This "action" of mercy was put into motion because God is love. He chose to express and prove this love by first bestowing His Divine favor which called for the action of His Divine mercy. This action of mercy

culminates in the lives of all those who believe in the atoning and acquitting sacrifice of the blood of Jesus by bringing them back into relationship with this loving God. We now have “peace” with God. We are now “set at one again” with our God. As Jesus states in John 17:3 and 21, “<sup>3</sup> *And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*” <sup>21</sup> *“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.”*”

It is not my intention to belittle any aspect of God, His character or His nature. It is almost impossible for us to totally grasp the fact that God is 100% of each one of His characteristics. He is 100% grace. He is 100% mercy. He is 100% faithful. He is 100% holy. He is 100% just, etc. However, each one of these characteristics serve a function that all stem from fact that God is 100% love. This is who our God is. This is the awesomeness of our God.

God expressed His covenant name to Moses in Exodus 3:14. Moses asked, “Who should he say is sending him?” God clearly declared who He was, “I AM THAT I AM...” It is that simple. God is that He is. He is who He says He is. God is the **only** self existent one. **Only** God has life in and of Himself. **Only** God can give life – not just the breath of life but spiritual life, as well. Hebrews 11:6 tells us, “*But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*” It is as simple as that. We are to simply believe that God is – He is **all** the things the scriptures tell us He is. And I mean ALL!! God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today and FOREVER!! (Hebrews 13:8) This means God is who He is as told to us in the Jewish scriptures. He is who He is as described in the New Testament scriptures. God is just; God is holy; God is gracious; God is faithful; God forgives; God is merciful, etc. And it all stems from the heart of God which is 100% love.

1John 4:19 tells us that, “*We now love Him because He first loved us.*” Let’s we face it. We had no clue how to love God or anyone else for that matter. It is only understood when we experience true love, God Himself now revealed in each of us as born again children of God. His Spirit came and put His love in action by regenerating our spirit that was dead to Him because of sin and now making us “alive unto God” through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 6:11) We experienced true love in action and because of that we now have the ability to do His will and keep His commandments thereby loving Him. (John 14:15)

How do we love God and try to express true gratefulness for all that He has done for us? I believe we start out by having an attitude of heart that simply desires to bless the heart of our God. We do this through living a lifestyle of both, loving Him and loving others as Jesus loved us. We do this not because we have to or that we are commanded to but we do this simply because we love God. We can now love God and love others as Jesus loved the Father, as well as each of us - through the power of His Spirit that is now dwelling within us. This is brought forth from an attitude of heart that now willfully and joyfully desires to pour out back unto Him the love that He poured out to us. We can now love God and others because we have received and experienced and have been inundated and immersed in true love by the God who is love.

1John 4:17 tells us, “*Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.*” This scripture is telling us that just as “**Jesus is,**” so **are we** now as we live this life here on the earth. Let’s follow this to its conclusive intent. If Jesus is God and God is love then each of us, through Jesus and the born again experience, are now “sons of God.” (John 1:12). As “sons of God” who have His spirit within us, then the fact is that our very being is saturated with and pouring forth the love of God - or at least we should be. Yes, we have all fallen short of this, I know. I am the first to say that about myself. However, that is no excuse. This must be the desire of our hearts. We must desire to be the living expression of our God who is love to those we come in contact with. We do this through showing forth His grace - showing favor to those lost in sin without being judgmental and condemning. We

then extend actions of His grace by being merciful to others, thereby being true witnesses of His grace and mercy to all we come in contact with. The purpose for all of this is to point as many as we can to the place where they would desire to receive and experience in their own heart this wonderful Father, God and His son, Jesus, who is love.

To answer my original question of, “Where did love go? It never left. It went to the cross for you and I. It was, is and always will be found right where it always can only truly be found – in the One who is love. As we conclude our discussion, even though it may sound strange, I want to encourage and exhort the Body of Christ to not allow the subtle exclusion of the fact that “God is love” from our vocabulary, from our preaching and teaching as well as from our worship music. Let us be reminded to never take it for granted and “move on” to more of the “deeper things” of God. The love of God is so deep, so wide and so vast that we can soak in and envelope our lives in it for all eternity and it will never run out. Yes, God’s grace is amazing! Yes, His mercy endures forever. But it is the awesome fact that it is His love that puts everything in motion simply because - God is love!!!

