THE LOVE OF GOD



"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us."
— 1 John 3:1

God the Father asks us to behold what manner, or what degree, of love He has for us. The focus of the entire Bible is on how much God the Father loves each one of us. Disbelieving God's love for us hinders our relationship with God. It was a disbelief of God's great love that started Satan on his downward path. (See Ezekiel 28:14-17.) It was a disbelief of God's great love that convinced Eve to sin. (See Genesis 3:1-6.) It is a disbelief

of God's great love that keeps us in sin. It is only through a revelation of God's infinite love that we will be brought into a loving relationship with God that surpasses any that we have yet had.

It has been Satan's goal to deceive men as to the true character of God. Satan would have us believe that God is not as loving as He claims to be, and he knows that if he can convince us on this issue we will never love God with all our heart. It is only with a true picture of God's love that we can ever love Him enough to fulfill the commandment Jesus called "the first and great commandment," which is to love God with all our heart. (See Matthew 22:37, 38.)

HOW CAN WE ATTAIN THAT LOVE?

Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." (John 14:15) The same thought is expressed in verse 23. "If a man love me, he will keep my words." (John 14:23) In the Greek Bible, verse 14 is translated like this: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." (Jay P. Green's Greek Interlinear)

This verse is a statement about a cause and effect relationship, rather than a command. Jesus said that if we love Him, the natural result of that love is that we will keep His

commandments. If we do not love God, we cannot, and will not, keep His commandments.

Jesus said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40)

If we love God with all our heart, we will not have any other gods before Him. We will not worship any graven image, break the Sabbath, or take His name in vain. If we love our neighbor as ourselves, we won't murder them, steal from them, bear false witness against them, covet their goods, commit adultery, or dishonor our parents.

For this reason Paul could say, with certainty, these words: "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.... Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." (Romans 13:8-10)

To love God with all our heart is the first and great commandment. Obviously you cannot break this one and still be keeping the commandments of God. As we can clearly see, if we are striving to keep God's commandments our first and highest goal is

to love God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. But how can this goal be accomplished?

John wrote, "We love Him, because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19) The only reason given for man loving God is, "because He first loved us." If we desire to love God we must first see His love for us. In proportion to how much we understand and appreciate God's love for us, so will be our love for God. If you see that God loves you a little bit, then your love for Him will be very little. If you see that God loves you even enough to yield up that which was most precious to Him, His only begotten Son, then your love for Him will be great.

HOW CAN WE KNOW GOD'S LOVE?

"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 4:9, 10) God has revealed His great love by yielding up His only-begotten Son.

"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. Herein is our love made perfect." (1 John 4:16, 17) Our love for God is made perfect by

knowing, believing, and dwelling in His love for us in that He gave His only-begotten Son.

We must first understand how we can know the love of God so that we can believe it and dwell upon it, which will perfect our love for Him. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His [Jesus'] life for us." (1 John3:16) To know God's love for us we must look at how He gave His Son to lay down His life for us.

THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

Mark wrote about the night before Christ's death: "And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and He saith to His disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray. And He taketh with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy; And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch [give strict attention to]. And He went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him." (Mark 14:32-35) Jesus asked His disciples to watch what was going on because He wanted them to know and believe the love God has for them so that their love for God might become perfected.

Let's take a look at what happened in the garden of Gethsemane. "Something was happening to Jesus that caused Him to be disgusted with His feelings, and those feelings terrified Him. What were those feelings?"

Isaiah prophesied, "The Lord laid on Him the iniquity [along with guilt] of us all." (Isaiah 53:6) Jesus experienced the shame that we feel when we sin, only magnified many times. This caused a separation between God and Himself. "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear." (Isaiah 59:2)

God truly loves us enough to give up His only begotten Son, and He wants us to behold, or to dwell upon, that precious truth. "For the love of Christ constraineth [compels or preoccupies] us." (2 Corinthians 5:14) We are to be preoccupied with the wonderful truth that God so loved the world that He allowed His only begotten Son to experience our guilt and to suffer the consequences of having that guilt laid upon Him.

Isaiah wrote, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee." (Isaiah 26:3) God knows that if we dwell upon the wonderful love that He has for us it will mold and shape us like

nothing else can. If we will constantly have a conscious realization of the love God has for us, and appreciate that love, we will finally be so disgusted with sin that we will refuse to allow it to dwell in us any longer. We can overcome sin with God's help.

"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4, 5) There is something about believing that Jesus is the Son of God that enables us to overcome sin. (See 1 John 2:15-17.) Since believing that Jesus is the Son of God enables us to overcome sin, do you think Satan would try to distort the fact that Jesus is the Son of God? Certainly he would. If we expect to overcome the world we must believe that Jesus really is the only-begotten (born) Son of God, and that God gave Him up for us.

"He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son." (1 John 5:10) God said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him." (Matthew 17:5) God said that Jesus Christ is His only-born Son, don't let anyone tell you differently.

"GOD'S GIFT OF HIS SON"

"Jesus, speaking of Himself, said, "When there were no depths, I was brought forth [born]; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth." (Proverbs 8:24, 25) The Hebrew word that was translated here as "brought forth" means "to be born" (Gesenius' Hebrew Lexicon). Jesus is the literal Son of God, born in heaven before the world was.

"It is only by knowing and believing that God so loved the world that He actually gave up His only born Son, that we can truly have our love for God perfected. Therefore, only by knowing and believing that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, can we keep His commandments."

"There will be a group of people in the last days who will love God with all their heart. They will know the love of God that passes knowledge. They will understand that God loves us so much that He gave up His only-begotten Son. This group of people are known as the 144,000. They are the ones who receive the seal of God. (See Revelation 7:1-4) They will be without fault. "And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.

... And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God." (Revelation 14:1, 5) They will not submit to the mark of the beast, and will be saved from all the plagues that come upon the earth."

"These people will understand God's love to such a degree that they will not sin. "The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid." (Zephaniah 3:13) These are a testimony for God that man can overcome sin. I want to be part of that number.

There will be another group in the last days; a group who will receive the mark of the beast. There will be only two groups. There will be no middle group. Either you will receive the mark of the beast or the seal of God. The group that receives the mark of the beast will not overcome sin. They will continue living in the sins that they have chosen. What will be their final outcome? "Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it." (Isaiah 13:9) Sinners will be destroyed when the Lord comes. They will cry out for the rocks to fall on them to hide them from the presence of the

Lord. Any cherished sin that is not repented of and forsaken will bring us down at that day and cause us to be destroyed. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." (Proverbs 28:13) Please get ready before it is too late!

There will be a proclamation that will go forth just prior to the return of the Lord, and all cases will be decided whether for good or for evil. "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." (Revelation 22:11, 12) This is a solemn warning. Please be ready!