

God is love: His love in action

In the beginning God created the earth and all that is in it, including man. Man was unique and special because God created him in His own image. Being created in His image means that we too can love, have compassion, be kind, have a natural tendency to do what is right and appreciate God's goodness. This is a major difference between man and other creatures. Thus God gave man authority over all things on earth.

God's aim in creating man was that he can have a harmonious and loving relationship with his creator. God never forced man into this relationship with Him and this is why He created human beings with a free will, so that we ourselves can choose to remain with God, acknowledge Him and submit to Him as our master and Lord. In a true relationship both sides give freedom to each other. God's love is visible in the fact that everything he created is good, especially man who is gifted with these qualities.

Mankind on its part played havoc with the design of God by doing things which were contrary to the purpose with which God made man. Man misused the gift of free will and acted against God. By this sin man separated himself from his creator. A God who is completely holy and loving expects man to be like Him but man brought disaster on himself by running after different forms of evil like:

- Sexual immorality and impurity
- Idolatry and black magic
- Hatred, jealousy, anger, selfish ambition, disputes, envy
- Drunkenness, orgies, etc.

Man had fallen away from the presence of God and had lost the closeness which he enjoyed in the beginning. In spite of this insult of God's wonderful creation by man, God in his everlasting mercy did not wipe out mankind from the face of the earth. He let them live in the patient hope that one day these people would come to their senses. Even in the time of wickedness of man, God did not withdraw his loving kindness in that He gave them rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; provided them with plenty of food and filled their hearts with joy.

Since the time when man destroyed the relationship with his creator, God has shown His great love in different ways.

- It was God who initiated to restore the relationship with man by making Himself known time and again to those who sought and obeyed Him.
- It was God who had plans to use these God-fearing people to lead humankind out of its miserable state back to the right path.
- And it was Him who wanted to prepare mankind by all this for His salvation and highest revelation.

Yet man was indifferent and unconcerned of his responsibility in building this relationship. Apart from a few people on the earth everyone else opposed the relationship with God.

It was through this handful of people who were obedient to God that He unfolded the mystery of salvation. In the book of the beginnings (Genesis 22:18) God promised the coming of a righteous man with these words:

... and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.

This covenant of love which was established by the word of God with Abraham was the pioneer of God's salvation plan for the whole of mankind. It was God's decision to bring man out of his fallen state through

the descendents of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Jacob who was later on called Israel. This Israel became a great nation who was the torchbearer of God's salvation. God's mighty hand was with them when He pronounced judgment on Egypt where the Israelites were slaves. Even in the time of slavery in Egypt God did not forsake them but rescued them from the bondage of slavery through a series of amazing events. God brought them out of Egypt through a vast desert into the Promised Land. There are many passages in the Bible which speak about the unfailing love of God in these times like:

Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you. (Deuteronomy 8:1-5)

It was a great setback and a sad event for God when Israel as a nation became disobedient to Him. The nation through whom God had planned to save the whole world turned out to be unfitting for carrying out this task. They exceedingly provoked God by their evil deeds in that they turned to worthless idols. They quickly forgot their Savior and sinned gravely against Him. In the book of Hosea (one of the prophets in the Bible) there is a beautiful chapter which compares the love of God towards Israel to that of a Father who loves his child:

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images. It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them. (Hosea 11:1-4)

God out of His mercy and love sent His servants and prophets time and again urging Israel, rebuking them and even punishing them in the hope that they might turn back to Him. Like a Father disciplines his child so God tried to discipline them but often His acts of love were repaid with hatred by the people of Israel. They persecuted the servants of God and prophets who brought different messages of love.

They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. (Acts of the Apostles 7:52)

In the parable of the tenants we see God's aim of sending His servants:

There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a wine press in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. "They will respect my son," he said. (Gospel of Matthew 21:33-36)

Should we think that God's plan of salvation was failing because Israel as a nation had altogether become disobedient and unfitting for the task? Absolutely not! One thing which we need to remember is God is not like man. His ways are not like ours. Man cannot hinder God from fulfilling His plans.

The time was drawing near for God to fulfill his promise made centuries before to Abraham. The greatest mystery in the history of mankind was about to be revealed: God Himself became man and dwelt among us. He was the Christ, the Holy One of God. In Jesus Christ the invisible God became

visible. This is the ultimate act of love when God who is Spirit became man and came so close to us that we were able to touch Him, see Him, and listen to him. His sole aim in becoming man was to show the way back to Him and to reconcile man with Himself. Since Jesus was completely man he showed how we can live a righteous life in obedience to the creator. Jesus Christ is not only our example whom we should follow but He is also our God and Lord.

In the letter to the Philippians Paul writes in chapter 2:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Letter to the Philippians 2:5–8)

In the letter to the Hebrews the writer introduces Christ with these words:

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. (Letter to the Hebrews 1:1–3)

These last days began with the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ into this world and with the good news He started to preach. In his own words he declared:

“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Gospel of Mark 1:15)

His ministry on earth was in accordance with the Old Testament prophecies made centuries earlier. His gracious words on the day when he stood up to read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah just confirms this fact:

Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:18–21)

The purpose with which God sent his son into the world was in accordance with the message previously preached by the servants of God who came before Jesus. As we read in the passage mentioned earlier,

Last of all, he sent his son to them. “They will respect my son”; he said. (Gospel of Matthew 21:37)

But Jesus revealed more than them. He was the fulfillment of the law given through Moses centuries before. This means that He is the final word of God requesting mankind to turn to Him.

When two disciples of Jesus, Peter and John, were arrested for healing a crippled man, they were brought before the supreme court of Israel (= Sanhedrin) whose members inquired:

“By what power or what name did you do this?” Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know

this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.” (Acts of the Apostles 4:7b–12)

Note the last verse (verse 12) of this passage:

... that there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

... and that name is Jesus Christ. Jesus' ministry on earth was accompanied by life-giving words and works of miracles. He lived a life completely obedient to God which God Himself confirmed by these words:

This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him! (Gospel of Matthew 17:5b)

There can be no greater witness than God himself who testifies about Jesus Christ:

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. (Gospel of John 1:12)

To be called children of God is a privilege and honor given to those who accept Jesus as their Savior. Those who accept Jesus and his words and put them into practice in their lives show that they love God and want to obey Him. They are the ones who respond to the love of God and are not indifferent to His call of love. Jesus showed God's love by giving freedom to those people who listened to his words—freedom to accept Him and follow Him. He never forced his words on anyone—thus respecting the free will of man.

In the world we see that people love each other based on some emotions, feelings, personal interests etc. They expect something in return. In contrast the love of God is unconditional. God's love, which is beyond human love, surpasses all understanding. Nowhere we see that God puts conditions like, “If you love me, then I would love you” or “Do this and that and then I will love you.” On the contrary, God loved us first, even before we ever imagined to love Him. As we read in 1 John

We love because he first loved us. (1 John 4:19)

This shows that only through God's love we can truly love. He makes us able to love with the same love with which He loved us. This love is further manifested in loving our fellow human beings.

God's love is unique and one is made to think: “In spite of my wickedness, disobedience, irreverence for God, why is He still extending His hand to help me? Why is He still waiting for me to turn to Him? Why does He still show His mercy to us so that we are found alive and breathing on this earth? Why???” In a prayer for the Christians at Ephesus, a town in today's Turkey, Paul says:

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Letter to the Ephesians 3:17b–19)

Truly God's love surpasses knowledge.

Conclusion

Although God and His love are beyond all knowledge and understanding, His love in action is an invitation for us to give up our own concept of love but instead learn from Him and to practice it. He calls us to have a living relationship with Him in which we long for Him and are eager to do His will instead of following our own desires or ideas. An obedient response to God's love also leads us to recognize the root cause of our sins—the lack of love. The sinful world connects freedom and joy with receiving and getting much for oneself, as opposed to the love of God which the Bible reveals as selfless service, devoting, and denying oneself for the others.

God extends His helping hand to those who are ready to love by helping them be free of their sins and to see what they should do instead of their sinful deeds—to love God and therefore their neighbor.

... he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” (Gospel of Mark 12:28b–31)

How do you intend to respond to God's love?