
Loving God

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If I were to ask you “Do you love God?,” you would probably think the question was ridiculous or preposterous. You may even be somewhat insulted by it. “Do I love God?” you say. “Of course I do. How could I not love Him after all that He has done to save me? He loved me so much that He became my Redeemer, dying upon the cross of Calvary in order to save me from having to suffer the horrible and eternal consequences of the debt and penalty of my sins. And when I trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ as my only and all-sufficient Savior, God freely forgave me my sins and justified me unto eternal life in His sight. So naturally I love God. He is my Savior. It is just as John says in I John 4:19, ‘We love him, because he first loved us.’”

Well now if the question “*Do you love God?*” could only be asked in the context of our response to God as our Savior, then it certainly would be a rather ridiculous question for me to ask. However this is not the only context in which this question can rightfully be asked. Nor is it the only context in which God Himself confronts His people with the issue of whether they love Him or not. And this is true both in God’s program with Israel and in His program with us today, who are the members of God’s “new creature,” the church the body of Christ, in this present dispensation of His grace.

So then the question, “*Do you love God?*” is not all that ridiculous, or preposterous, to ask. For the truth of the matter is that though you may love God as your Savior, you may not love Him as you ought to in some other way, or in some other context.

Some of the Other Ways and Other Contexts

Before asking this question again, it will be helpful to us if we take a brief look at some examples of other contexts in which the issue of ‘loving God,’ or not ‘loving Him,’ occurs. In so doing it will help us not only to appreciate some of the different ways and different contexts in which God speaks about His people loving Him, but also it will help us to realize that God truly does expect His people to love Him for reasons other than Him being their Savior.

For example, consider what the Psalmist declares in the one hundred and sixteenth Psalm.

1 I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice *and* my supplications.

(Psalm 116:1)

Here the Psalmist proclaims, “I love the LORD.” Yet as the rest of what he says clearly shows, he does not say that he ‘loves the LORD’ because God has justified him in His sight. In other words, the Psalmist is not talking about ‘loving God’ as the one who has saved him from his sins. That he is justified in God’s sight, and that he knows that this is so, is evident. For as he states later on, he knows that he is a “saint,” and also that he is the LORD’s “servant.” Hence he is justified in God’s sight, and as such he undoubtedly does ‘love God’ as his Savior. But, once again, this is not what he has in mind when he declares, “I love the LORD.” Instead, he is talking about loving God for another reason, and in response to God being something more to him besides his Savior.

The Psalmist says that he ‘loves the LORD’ “because he hath heard my voice *and* my

supplications.” This, then, is his specific reason for ‘loving God.’ And as he goes to explain in the Psalm, this particular love for the LORD was something that eventually developed in him. It came about as a fruit of his edification.

3 The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow.

4 Then called I upon the name of the LORD; O LORD, I beseech thee, deliver my soul.

5 Gracious *is* the LORD, and righteous; yea, our God *is* merciful.

6 The LORD preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me.

(Psalm 116:3-6)

In the balance of the Psalm the Psalmist sets forth how he had been taught about a particular aspect of God’s “Jehovah-ness” for His people. An aspect in which God promised to be merciful to them, and would provide deliverance for them, especially when their souls were afflicted with the horrors of death for His name’s sake. Though the Psalmist had not needed to benefit from this particular aspect of God’s mercy up until now, when the specified affliction eventually came to pass he “called upon the name of the LORD” in connection with what he had been taught about this promised aspect of God’s “Jehovah-ness.” And as he relates, God was true to His word. “He helped me,” as the Psalmist says. For this reason he says, “I love the LORD.”

Simply put, the issue of God being the ‘Deliverer’ of his soul, (delivering him from the extreme afflictions of the Satanic policy of evil against him), is the specific reason why the Psalmist says, “I love the LORD.” He, therefore, loved God not only as his Justifier, but also as his ‘Deliverer’ from the ploys and tactics of the policy of evil against him. Once again this particular love for the LORD developed within him as a subsequent issue sometime after he had been justified.

In fact in view of the doctrinal role that the book of Psalms has in God’s program with Israel, notice that this same kind of love for the LORD is brought up and taught about on more than one occasion. It is first set forth and expressed by David himself earlier on in Psalm 18. Then once it is learned by the remnant of Israel, in Psalm 31 it is personally urged upon them as something for them to likewise possess.

1 I will love thee, O LORD, my strength.

2 The LORD *is* my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, *and* my high tower.

3 I will call upon the LORD, *who is worthy* to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies.

(Psalm 18:1-3)

23 O love the LORD, all ye his saints: *for* the LORD preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer.

(Psalm 31:23)

Though David loved God as his Justifier, and had loved Him as such for quite some time, he came to love God as his “rock,” “fortress,” “deliverer,” “strength,” and the like, later on in his life when He learned about these other aspects of God’s “Jehovah-ness” unto him. This is also the way it will be with the believing remnant of Israel in the final installment of Israel’s program yet to come. At that time they too will come to love God in these same ways, and for these same reasons, as they face the same kinds of afflictions in the “time of Jacob’s trouble.” Hence they are exhorted, “O love the LORD, all ye his saints.”

Consider another example of God’s people ‘loving Him’ in a context, and for a reason, which are other than that of simply loving Him as their Savior.

27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

28 Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come *again* unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I.

(John 14:27–28)

Here in the opening portion to the climactic stage in God's program with Israel, the Lord is preparing His apostles for His imminent rejection and for His subsequent return to the Father. As He does this, He particularly addresses the issue of their less-than-happy response to the significant and expedient event of His impending departure from them. In fact He pointedly reproves them for the contrary nature of their response when He says to them, "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I."

"If ye loved me," the Lord said to them, "ye would rejoice." As far as the Lord was concerned they did not love Him, because they were not rejoicing. And indeed they were not rejoicing. Instead their hearts were troubled and they were filled with sorrow, just as the Lord said. Yet did they not love Jesus as their Lord? Did they not love Him as their Savior, and even as the King of Israel? Had not the Lord earlier on acknowledged that they did love Him as such? Yes! But now He indicates that their lack of rejoicing is because they did not love Him.

Obviously the Lord is not speaking here about the apostles loving Him simply as their Lord and/or Savior. Rather He is speaking about them loving Him particularly in view of Him being Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, who is at this time entering into the process of fulfilling the mandates of the Davidic Covenant for the salvation of Israel and for the establishment of God's kingdom on the earth. Specifically the Lord is speaking about them loving Him in view of this highly significant event that is about to

occur in His ministry as the Christ, and loving Him in view of the wonderful advance that it will be in the outworking of the program.

Now if the apostles loved Jesus in connection with this, then, as the Lord said to them, they "would rejoice." For as He explains to them, His departure will not be a defeat, or a set back, or anything like that at all. Instead it will be the exact opposite, for as He said, "I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I."

So then the significance of this event truly was cause for the apostles to rejoice, just as it was for the Lord Himself. Nevertheless at this point in time they did not love the Lord for this particular reason and in this particular way, though they would do so later on.

Also during this time the apostle Peter was singled out and was confronted by the Lord with the issue of 'loving Him.' However this was for an additional and different reason altogether. It pertained to a very particular reason which uniquely belonged to Peter. And in view of it, it was needful for the Lord to confront Peter with the issue of whether he 'loved Him' in connection with it.

15 So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, *son* of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, *son* of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, *son* of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

18 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry *thee* whither thou wouldst not.

19 This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.

(John 21:15-19)

Here, following His resurrection, the Lord pointedly questions Peter three times as to whether he loved Him. But the Lord's questioning did not pertain to whether Peter loved Jesus simply for who He is as his Lord and his God, or as his Savior, or even as the King of Israel. But for another reason entirely.

The Lord questions Peter about whether he loved Him in connection with the fact that the Lord had entrusted him with both the leadership of the apostles and with overseeing the edification of the remnant of Israel. For this reason the Lord's questioning was three-fold, and His responses to Peter's replies were, "Feed my lambs"; "Feed my sheep"; "Feed my sheep." Also for this reason the Lord pointedly informed Peter of what the future held for him in view of what had been entrusted to him. Likewise for this same reason the Lord appropriately capped off the thought-provoking

questions by saying to Peter, "Follow me."

Hence in essence the Lord asked Peter whether he loved Him in view of who He had made him to be among the rest of the apostles and over the remnant of Israel. Peter loved the Lord as his God and as his Savior and as Israel's King. But did he love the Lord in this particular respect? This was the question at hand, and the question that Peter 'needed to come to grips with' as the time rapidly approached for him to function in this special position which the Lord had given to him.

Consider yet one more example of saints 'loving God' in a context other than that of salvation. This time let us take note of one that pertains to us in this present dispensation of God's grace.

In I Corinthians 8, the apostle Paul reproves some of the saints at Corinth for not walking charitably one toward another, especially towards ones who are weak in the faith. As he does this, Paul makes sure from the outset that the Corinthian saints realize the reason behind their lack of charity. And that reason was rooted in them *not loving God*.

1 Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.

2 And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.

3 But if any man love God, the same is known of him.

(I Corinthians 8:1-3)

The Corinthians enjoyed the exercise of their sonship liberty in Christ. They knew that they had such liberty, and they exercised it in many ways; particularly in the eating of meats offered in sacrifice to idols. However their "knowledge" regarding the doctrine of our sonship status and its liberty was only partial. They had learned, understood, and appreciated, only the initial aspects of the doctrine, as Paul makes clear to them in verse 2. They had failed to learn all that they should have learned. This then resulted in

them misusing what little they had learned, and becoming ‘puffed up,’ rather than having the fulness of the doctrine effectually work within them to make them charitable.

Now “charity” would have begun to have been effectually produced within them had they continued on in the doctrine of their sonship and its liberty. For the fact is that this doctrine is specifically designed by God to produce charity in us — genuine Godly charity — but only *after* it has first established and effectually produced the workings of its “liberty” within us. For the truth of the matter is that sonship “liberty” functions as the womb in which Godly charity is conceived, and from which it is given birth, and then from which it comes forth to grow and to mature.

The Corinthians, though, failed to realize this and respond to it as they should. In so doing they failed to go on in the doctrine to the production of Godly charity within them. And they failed to do this because in a very particular way they had ceased to “love God.” Hence Paul’s reproof says to them, “But if any man love God, the same is known of him.”

Simply put the Corinthians had ceased to love God as their “Father,” who having adopted them as “sons” had been educating them *as His “sons.”* Regrettably these saints had fallen victim to one of the classic temptations that occurs in the early stages of sonship edification. A temptation about which they had been forewarned by God the Father. For He had warned them about it in perfect accord with a father’s admonishing of his son. Yet though they were forewarned, these saints fell victim to it, and as a result their love waxed cold.

Hence what should have been “known of” them, as ones who “love God,” was not “known of” them. For having been tempted and having succumbed to it, they now did not “love God” as they should, or as they once had.

Therefore though these saints were just that — saints — and as such undoubtedly loved God as their Justifier and Savior, they did not love God in another way. They did not love God in the particular context that Paul is speaking about in I Corinthians 8. For this reason they themselves did not walk in love and charity among themselves.

Now what we have taken note of are just a few examples of saints ‘loving God’ for reasons other than that of salvation. And clearly such other reasons exist, which make it so that God truly does expect His people to love Him for reasons other than just being their Savior.

Loving God, or Not

So then is it possible for a Christian to not love God? Certainly. Especially when God is talking about us loving Him in some other way, or for some other reason, than in response to the fact that He is our God, and that He has justified us and saved us freely by His grace.

Wherefore, for example, we not only have Paul dealing with the Corinthians lack of loving God in I Corinthians 8, but we also have his charge in I Corinthians 16.

22 If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha.

(I Corinthians 16:22)

Furthermore, in the closing to Ephesians Paul declares,...

24 Grace *be* with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.

(Ephesians 6:24)

Hence it is also possible for saints not to love the Lord Jesus Christ “in sincerity.”

Moreover as Paul teaches in II Timothy 3, one of the grievous and perilous effects belonging to the evolution of man’s ungodliness during this present dispensation is that of Christians

themselves becoming “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.” Indeed, in view of what it means to be a ‘lover of God’ in the context of II Timothy, a great many Christians today clearly do not love God very much. They may love Him as their Justifier and Savior, but when it comes to loving Him in connection with what His good pleasure is for their lives, they find pleasure in other things. And they love these other things more. They, therefore, truly are “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.”

The fact is that as we go through our epistles we find that Paul was both familiar with, and had to deal with, saints who either did not love God very much at all, or did not love Him in sincerity, or loved other things more than Him. He also dealt with saints who for various reasons were having difficulties in learning to love God in the different ways that we should, or were ones who had had their love supplanted, or who even suppressed it.

In truth, therefore, we need to recognize that God wants us to love Him for a number of reasons, with many of them being reasons that we only come to learn about, and are able to respond to, as our edification progresses on. We may very well sing the song, “*Oh, how I love Jesus*”; but loving Him as per the opening verses to that song is clearly not the only way that God talks about us loving Him, or even wants us to love Him. (Indeed the songwriter himself testifies to this, as the remaining verses to his composition declare.) Consequently it could be that we do not love God very much, or yet love God, in some of these other ways.

Once Again the Question, *Do You Love God?*

To bring the point of this question home, let us borrow some well known words from a poem by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. But we will put her words in the more noble setting of loving God.

“How do I love thee? Let me count the ways,” she wrote. Let us, instead, say, ‘How do I love thee, O God? Let me count the ways.’

And indeed we can do this very thing. For in accordance with the way that God is educating and edifying us, He not only provides for us to love Him, but for our love for Him to actually grow, abound, and mature. Moreover He provides for us to realize this and recognize it. (In fact by the very same methodology God provides for our love for each other, as the “members one of another” that we are, to likewise grow, abound, and mature. Hence we find Paul speaking to us about, and teaching us about, ‘abounding love.’¹)

Simply put, enumerating our love for God begins with “the gospel of Christ” and the doctrine of our justification unto eternal life, and the resulting hope of salvation that we now have being justified in God’s sight. These particular issues are the subject matter of the first five chapters of Romans. And the effectual working within us of the gospel and the doctrines that are contained therein are designed by God to not only fully assure our hearts about our justification and its accompanying salvation, but also to effectually produce within us the corresponding love that we should have for God as our Redeemer, Justifier and Savior.

Wherefore, doctrinally speaking, we are to graduate from the education and edification of Romans 1–5 with complete assurance regarding both the reality of, and the security of, our justification and salvation. Moreover we are to graduate with the issue of loving God as our Redeemer, Justifier and Savior fully established and functioning within us.

However this is only the beginning to our education and edification. And this also means that this is only the beginning of us ‘loving God’ in response to who He is and what He has done for us. For indeed God has done much more for us than redeem us, justify us and save us. Hence He is to be loved by us for far more than simply being our Justifier and Savior.

So then as the foundation to our education and edification continues to be laid in Romans, we

immediately encounter a reason for our love for God to grow. Beginning in Romans 6 we are taught the doctrine of our sanctification “in Christ.” Through the effectual working of this doctrine we not only learn the reality of our sanctification, but we also learn how to put it into practice and so “live unto God” in the details of our lives. Furthermore, and in accordance with God generating love for Him within us, this particular doctrine also effectually works to produce within us the corresponding love for God as our Sanctifier.

Yet this too is not all. For as the foundation to our education and edification continues on, we come to the point in the latter portion of Romans 8 where we are taught that we have also received “the adoption of sons.” In connection with learning about this, we have reason to ‘love God’ in yet another way.

By the doctrine of “the adoption of sons” we learn to love God as our “Father.” However not simply by virtue of regeneration, but more so by virtue of what it means for us to now be dealt with by God our Father as an adult son. In other words just as a child comes to love his father in a special, more meaningful way when his father adopts him into sonship and they both enter into the unparalleled intimate relationship and fellowship of ‘father and son,’ so also should it be with us and God our Father.

So then by the effectual working within us of Romans 8:14–15ff we as “sons” should come to love God as our “Father.” And in so doing, at this particular point in our education and edification we should at least love God as our Redeemer, Justifier, Savior, Sanctifier, and Father. However this is still only the beginning for us.

A Gateway into Manifold Love

In the progress of our education and edification, the fact is that we reach a gateway, so to speak, when we come to learn about our sonship status and in response to it come to love God as our

“Father.” For by the nature of the ‘father and son’ relationship, (and in accordance with the close fellowship belonging to it), sonship functions as a gateway by which we enter into the realm of learning to love God for so many more reasons and in so many more ways. Particularly for reasons that become very personal and in ways that are very intimate.

Indeed it is through the edification and the fellowship belonging to sonship that a son learns things about his father, and is taught things by his father, that he never knew. Things that his father either could not teach him, or that he could not fully appreciate, until his father adopted him and he began to personally teach him and educate him. This being so, as the son learns them he is brought into close, intimate fellowship with his father and thereby learns to love him for many more reasons and in many more ways than he did before. He therefore comes to love his father to a higher degree, and to a greater magnitude, than he had loved him before.

Hence it is that as God’s “sons” we too come to learn things about God that we never knew, or were not in the position to fully appreciate before. Things that He can only now teach us about Himself, having adopted us as “sons” and having given to us the specific curriculum for our sonship education and edification.

Therefore it is through the outworking and progress of our sonship edification that we are brought into close, intimate fellowship with God our Father, and our love for God is able to grow beyond the issue of loving Him only as our Justifier and Savior. Rather our love for God is able to actually expand and abound, and even deepen and mature; resulting in our ability to give a manifold response to the question, ‘How do I love thee, O God? Let me count the ways.’

Yea, it is through our sonship education and edification that we enter into a love affair with our God and our Father, which makes it so that throughout the course of our edification and

maturing relationship we are enabled to say to Him, “Abba, Father; I love thee today more than yesterday, yet less than tomorrow.”

A Quick Sampling

Our sonship status and its edification truly is a gateway for us into a growing and manifold love for God. For this reason as we proceed through the curriculum for our sonship edification, and we deal with the forms of doctrine that are set before us therein, we have our Father presenting Himself to us in a number of different ways. Even by taking a quick sampling from the opening portion to our edification we can see that we are to learn to understand, appreciate, and love God not only as our Redeemer, Justifier, Savior, Sanctifier, and “Father,” but also as “the God of patience and consolation”²; “the God of peace”³; “the God of hope”⁴; “the only wise God”⁵; and “the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort”⁶; to name just a few.

Wherefore, once again, the question “*Do you love God?*” is not all that ridiculous to ask. Instead it is both a genuine and vital question to ask. Moreover it is a vital question for us to answer.

How then do you love God? Can you count the ways? Do you love God for more than being your Redeemer, Justifier, and Savior? Do you love God as your “Father” in view of receiving “the adoption of sons”? More pointedly, does your sonship edification have you loving God yet more and more as your intimacy of fellowship with Him grows and matures?

May it be that your love for God is indeed manifold; that through the effectual working of your sonship edification you are learning to love God your Father for the many reasons, and in the many ways, that we as His “sons” should love Him. But most of all may it be that you are not among those who, though saints, are “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.” — *K.R. Blades*

¹ See, for example, II Corinthians 12:15; Philippians 1:9; I Thessalonians 4:9–10; II Thessalonians 1:3. Sadly, as in II Corinthians, it is also possible for the love of saints to actually lessen, or diminish; and for this to happen even when they are being loved by others more and more.

² Romans 15:5

³ Romans 15:33; 16:20

⁴ Romans 15:13

⁵ Romans 16:27

⁶ II Corinthians 1:3