

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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Christ's Love for His Own

November 15, 2015

Sermon Text: Assorted

Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 7

Introduction-

Deuteronomy 7:6-10 "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people **for his treasured possession**, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. (7) It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD **set his love on you** and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, (8) but **it is because the LORD loves you** and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (9) Know

therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God **who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him** and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, (10) and repays to their face those who hate him, by destroying them. He will not be slack with one who hates him. He will repay him to his face.

One of the most incredible qualities of the nature of God is this:

1 John 4:16 So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

Human beings, in their sin, have devised all kinds of gods down through the centuries.

God is Lord, and creation is his servant...God's control is his power to bring all things to pass according to the counsel of his will (Eph 1:11). His authority is his right to be obeyed, so that his control has a moral basis. His presence is his nearness to his creation

and his intimate relationships with it...His presence means that nothing in the universe can escape from his control or authority (Ps 139).

So abandoning God's lordship leads to the corruption of human life in ethics and worship (Romans 1), but also in knowledge....The sin of these people [in Romans 1] begins, then, in the area of knowledge.

Sinners at heart do not want to live in God's world, though they have no choice about it. They recognize the truth to some extent, because they need to get along and to make a living. But they would very much like the world to be different, and often they either try to make it different or pretend that it is. In the unbelieving fantasy world, the Lord of the Bible does not exist, and man is free to live by his own standards of truth and right. In a word, the unbeliever lives as if he were autonomous, subject only to his own law. Nobody can be really autonomous, because we are all subject to God's control, authority, and presence. But we pretend we are autonomous; we act as though we were autonomous, in the unbelieving fantasy world.

And consistently, these gods are impersonal OR at least, not absolute in their sovereignty. Once more, John Frame notes the difference:

"Absolute beings are fairly common in religious and philosophical literature. The Greek Fate, the Hindu Brahma, Parmenides' Being, Plato's Idea of the Good, Aristotle's Prime Mover, Plotinus' One, and Hegel's Absolute may fairly be described as absolute beings, possessing the attribute of aseity (exists in itself, not dependent upon anything outside itself for existence).

But the biblical God also has the attributes of personality. He is not only absolute, but personal: he knows, loves, speaks. So not only is he the fundamental cause of everything, but our relationship with him is the most important of all our personal relationships. He not only makes us, but tells us his will, expresses his love, provides salvation from sin, and tells us what he has done to redeem.

Belief in personal gods can be found in many religions. The old polytheisms of Greece, Rome, Egypt, Babylon, Canaan, India, Scandinavia, Germany, and elsewhere are religions of personal gods. But these personal gods are never absolute beings. Zeus and Hera, for example, had parents, and were subject to fits of anger and jealousy. The gods of polytheism are not a se [self-existing], not all-powerful, and certainly not paragons of morality and truth.

Only biblical religion acknowledges an absolute being who is also personal. So for the Christian, the Creator of the universe is also our Lord, our ultimate Judge, and our dearest friend. So the God of the Bible is not only the First Cause, but also the ultimate standard of truth and right. [A History of Western Philosophy and Theology]

1 John 4:16 So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

God IS love. He is not only loving, but in his very essence and nature he is love. He is also holy. Just. Merciful. Gracious. But there are certain “core truths” about the nature of God, and this is one of them – *God is love*, just as *God is light*. So the history of God’s redemption of us in Christ is a history of the outworking of who he is – love. It involves every other aspect of his being as well, but this truth – *God is love* – is very much at the base of it.

All through Scripture then we see God who is love, being who he is, exercising this love for his creatures, be they human or animals (he feeds the birds) or even in a way, the inanimate part of creation as he works in his Son to remove the curse from it.

Romans 5:8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

We know full well that man in his sin frequently distorts this truth. At the expense of God’s justice and holiness, the mantra “God is love” is thrown in our faces so that the wicked can pursue their sin unmolested by any kind of rebuke. But we must not permit this misuse of truth to cause us to avoid dwelling on it: *God is love*.

At the very heart of God’s covenant of salvation is His love for us, as we have seen in the Scripture reading already taken from Deuteronomy 7. Why does God do what He does in regard to establishing His redeeming, saving covenant with His people? For his glory, yes. For the glory of his holy justice, yes. But also because God is love. He cannot be other than that. His love for us can never cease because that would require God himself to cease, which cannot be.

1 Kings 8:22-23 Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven, (23) and said, "O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your

servants who walk before you with all their heart,

Psalms 25:10 All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

Isaiah 54:10 For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you.

Daniel 9:4 I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments,

Those are Old Testament passages, and you might be thinking, well – “but this promise of His love is for those *who keep his covenant and his testimonies*, and I sin every day.” However, the New Covenant has been kept by Christ for us, and unlike the Old Covenant, this Covenant is inscribed upon our hearts so that the Christian in his being now loves God and desires to obey him. And therefore:

Romans 8:31-37 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (32) He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (33) Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. (34) Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died--more than that, who was raised--who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. (35) Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? (36) As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." (37) No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

So it is impossible that God's love for His people can ever end. Impossible. When you sin, you are not condemned. When the world hates you, God still loves you.

God Expresses This Love

There are many expressions of God's love for us. We see it in His care of us (and in a degree to all human beings) in the order of the natural creation. The

rain on the just and the unjust for example. But His covenant love, His love that is that of a Father for His children, this love is reserved for His elect. It is an unending love, and He wants us to know it – personally and experientially. And so we read:

Romans 8:15-17 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" (16) The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, (17) and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, (22) and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

Ephesians 1:13-14 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, (14) who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

God communicates His love to and with His people, and the most powerful way that He does this is personally, in them, by His Spirit in them. The Holy Spirit in this regard is called "the Spirit of Adoption" because, at least in part, it is the Holy Spirit who communicates directly to us that we ARE now children of God and heirs of all the promises in Christ. We "hear" his voice and we have this assurance that God is no longer the fearsome, thundering voice of Sinai for us, but Abba, Father.

God has given us this "seal" of His ownership of us and His love for us. The Spirit in us is our guarantee that we belong to Him:

1 John 4:13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

All of this presumes then that we can KNOW the Spirit is in us! Right? But how? There are a number of ways:

- Our love for God as He is in truth. We used to hate him. No longer.
- Our love for His Word and assurance that it is true. This is the Spirit working in us.
- Our love for Christ's people, whom we used to hate.

- The Spirit taking the promises and truths of God's Word and driving them home to us in such a way that they are real, that they are felt, that we not only READ that we are His, but we FEEL that we are His.
- The leading of the Spirit as He rises up in us to oppose the desires of our flesh, convincing us of sin and leading us in righteousness.

will live. (14) For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

This working of the Spirit then in so many ways is a powerful confirmation of God's love for us. If you have been a Christian for a long time, you may have come to think of these things as "normal" and even have lost sight of them working in you. But these things are real. A fallen, sinful human being still dead in sin does not:

Romans 8:7-14 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. (8) Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (9) You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. (10) But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. (11) If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. (12) So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. (13) For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you

- Love God
- Love God's people
- Love God's truth
- Hate sin
- Reject the world, but in fact loves the world
- Experience waves of the personal love of God sweeping over them on certain occasions when the Lord chooses to powerfully drive home a promise or truth of His word in our hearts
- Put to death the deeds of the body because the Spirit in him is rising up to oppose that evil
- Confess Jesus before men no matter what the cost

Here it is again:

1 John 2:19-27 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would

have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. (20) But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. (21) I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. (22) Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. (23) No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. (24) Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. (25) And this is the promise that he made to us--eternal life. (26) I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. (27) But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie--just as it has taught you, abide in him.

Scars as Love

The chief expression of the love of God for His people of course is *Christ*. The gospel. The cross.

Romans 5:9-11 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. (10) For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. (11) More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

This last weekend one of the people attending the conference I went to read an essay she wrote on the scars of Christ. She wondered why, in the resurrection, Christ chose to retain His scars. Interesting question, right?

Luke 24:38-40 And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? (39) See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." (40) And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

John 20:24-27 Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. (25) So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But

he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." (26) Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." (27) Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."

Part of the answer, clearly, is that those scars left by the nails and the spear served as proof of Christ's resurrection. But there surely could have been other forms of convincing proofs. Why these?

Revelation 5:6-10 And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, **as though it had been slain**, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. (7) And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. (8) And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of

incense, which are the prayers of the saints. (9) And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, (10) and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."

Somehow there were marks on that Lamb. The scars remind us of the basis and cost of our redemption: the blood and life of the Son of God. And of His right to rule and judge and to be worshipped.

But these scars will also serve to remind us once more of Christ's great love for us. A good friend might "take a bullet" for someone he loves and the resulting scar would serve as a symbol of his love. God reminds us then of His great love for us by leaving the scars in the resurrected, perfect body of His Son.

Finally, let's notice one more truth about the love of God. Namely, that it is *eternal*:

1 Corinthians 13:8-13 Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. (9) For we know in part and

we prophesy in part, (10) but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. (11) When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. (12) For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. (13) So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

In the new heavens and earth, *faith* will not exist. We will SEE and no longer trust in the unseen. Hope will cease because the promises hoped for will be ours in fullness. But *love*. Love will endure for ever. Of all qualities, then, love is perhaps the most identifying of the kingdom of God and those who belong to it:

John 13:34-35 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. (35) By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Because God is love.