

Godly Love is Not an Emotion

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Brethren, if I were to ask you to briefly sum up the mind and character of God, the very essence of His character that we're all striving to become, I'm willing to bet that most all of you would have a similar answer. You would probably turn to the same scripture to back up your answer. You would probably turn to 1 John, chapter 4, and show me where it says, "God is love." That is correct. That is the very summation of His mind and His character. In fact, if you were to ask the average professing Christian in America the same question, you'd probably get a similar answer from them also. They would use the same scripture to back up their answer.

However, when you go to apply that concept of what that actually means, often we have very different understandings. We can misunderstand what this means, as to what the Bible refers to as "Godly love" versus how we typically use that term.

The term "love" as we typically use it in the English language, often gets used in the context of emotional feelings. Think of it in terms of how we usually use the word. We may talk about how we love someone or we're in love with someone. We may even use the word love to talk about a particular hobby that we really enjoy doing. We may talk about a vacation spot that we like, and say, "I just love going there." We will use the word love in those contexts. So, what we're often referring to when we use the term is either *strong affectionate feelings or things that make us feel positive*. We're talking about things we enjoy that make us feel good. So, as a result, we often use the word love in terms of what makes us feel good.

If you're using that definition when you read the Bible and think of Godly love, you can come up with some very flawed conclusions. As we're going to see today, that's an inaccurate way to look at Godly love. If we look at it from that kind of understanding, in terms of emotion in our physical logic, you can get some flawed conclusions as to how to apply this in your own life. You'll also have trouble understanding God's plan and how He works with mankind, whether you're talking about examples you see in the Bible or how He works in your life today, or even how we look at Bible prophecy and what's ahead of us in God's plan. If you look at love from the concept of things that feel good while they're happening, you can get an inaccurate conclusion.

The title of this sermon is:

Godly Love is Not an Emotion

Let's turn to the scripture that I alluded to.

1 John 4:7. *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.*

8) He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. (NKJV)

Again, this is the scripture we most often quote when we think about the very mind and nature of God. Love is the correct answer. Now let's look at these two verses again, and let's insert this meaning of strong affectionate feelings, and see how it doesn't really fit the true meaning.

1 John 4:7. Beloved, let us have [strong affectionate feelings] for one another, for [strong affectionate feelings] are of God; and everyone who has [strong affectionate feelings] is born of God and knows God.

8) He who does not have [strong affectionate feelings] does not know God, for God is [strong affectionate feelings.]

You see, it doesn't fit with the meaning of what it's talking about here.

What we're going to see is, yes, God's love, His mind, His character, if we follow His way of life, does ultimately end in a very positive picture that feels very good. However, if you're expecting these things to feel good on the front end, it is a very flawed way of looking at it. To see that, all we have to do is read the next couple of verses. The Bible gives us one of the strongest examples of God's love.

9) In this the love of God was manifested toward us ... (NKJV)

This is the primary example of His love toward us.

9b) ... that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.

10) In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

11) Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (NKJV)

What he's talking about here is sending Jesus Christ to earth as a human being to be the sacrifice for all of us, to give us an opportunity at salvation. He's demonstrating this as the ultimate expression of God's love.

We're going to analyze this example in light of this thought process of love being described as feelings and things that feel good, particularly at the time when the actions are happening. You're going to see that this is an incorrect idea.

What's ironic about this is the scripture that we're about to read. It also refers to the exact example of God's love being demonstrated by sending Christ to earth. It's probably one of the most commonly known and quoted scriptures in the Protestant world today. The reason I mention that is because, if you're familiar with the Protestant world today in the U.S., they're strongly attached to this idea of love in terms of emotions and things that make you feel good, warm, fuzzy and positive. That's often their view of love.

Also, the most common scripture you'll often hear that the Protestants know and quote is John 3:16. Let's turn to that scripture. We're going to analyze this particular example to see that it actually tells us a lot more in terms of evaluating Godly love.

John 3:16. *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (NKJV)*

This is one of the ultimate expressions of God's love, that He sent Jesus Christ to earth to be the sacrifice for our sins.

Now let's think about the actual event it's referring to here and evaluate it from the prospective of how it would feel, how it appeals to our human logic. What he's talking about is not just the thirty-three years that Jesus Christ lived on the earth, he's also specifically referring to the very end of His life. At the very end of Jesus Christ's life, He is falsely arrested, He is tortured, and brutally murdered so that He can become the sacrifice for all of us.

Think about how this plays out and how this feels for all the parties involved while it's taking place, because we're talking about torture and murder. There's nothing warm and fuzzy and positive about this event. This was difficult and painful to go through.

Analyze it from both sides. You have the Father; this is the ultimate expression of His love. He gave His son for us. The Bible doesn't describe for us in detail exactly what God the Father experienced as He was going through this. Let's think of this in terms of a physical father. Those of you who know me know that I've never been a parent, but throughout my life I've talked to a number of parents, particularly those who had young children going through difficult trials. Perhaps it was a painful health trial that they were suffering through. It's not unusual in situations like that for the parents to express how difficult this is for them, the helpless feeling they go through, watching their children suffer. They wish so bad that they could intervene and prevent this from happening. It's also not unusual to hear them express the desire that, "I wish I could trade places with my child. I would have the pain, and my child could be spared from having to face this difficult trial.

The point I'm getting at is how emotionally painful this can be for the parent who is watching this take place. God, the Father is a loving parent, and He is in those shoes, watching all of this take place.

Let's also look at this from the perspective of what this was like for Jesus Christ to experience, because He's on the receiving end of this.

Keep your place in John 3:16, because we'll turn back to it in a minute.

In regards to what Jesus Christ experienced, we don't have to speculate there, because the Bible tells us in graphic detail. These scriptures basically tell us what Christ was experiencing that night, right before He was to be arrested, betrayed and tortured and

killed. Keep in mind that what we're about to read here occurred after He kept the Passover with His disciples and prior to when He is actually taken captive and arrested. Keep in mind that He is the God of the Old Testament, and He inspired Isaiah as to what to write. In other words, He knows in graphic detail what is about to occur. What's about to take place isn't going to be a surprise.

Matthew 26:36. *Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there."*

37) *And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed.*

38) *Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me."*

39) *He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."*

40) *Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour?"*

41) *Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."*

42) *Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done."*

43) *And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy.*

44) *So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. (NKJV)*

In other words, He is begging God the Father for a plan B you might say. He knows in great detail what's about happen, and He's not looking forward to going through it. He is really hoping that God could work something out so He could skip this scenario.

We won't take the time to go over to Hebrews, chapter 5, but if you read that chapter, you'll realize that this event describes Christ as crying out to God the Father with vehement cries and tears. In other words, this was a very painful situation that He is dreading and He's hoping to avoid it.

What I'm trying to get you to see here is that there was nothing warm and fuzzy about this. There was nothing positive and encouraging about looking forward to this event. This was painful and difficult for all parties involved.

So, why is this described as the ultimate act of love? Turn back to John 3. We're going to read through verse 16 again, and then add verse 17.

John 3:16. *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son ... (NKJV)*

Now let's understand why He did this.

16b) ... that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

17) For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (NKJV)

You see, the reason this is described as this great act of love is because of what it resulted in. It wasn't because of what the experience was like when they were going through it and how it felt for those involved, because it was an ugly and painful experience that nobody would have enjoyed on the front end.

It ultimately results in a great benefit for all parties involved, because, analyze this situation from multiple angles here. We know, obviously, one of the great benefits from all of this is that all mankind is offered the opportunity to be born into God's family, to receive salvation. There's a huge benefit that comes from that. But it wasn't just all of us who benefitted from it. Both Christ and the Father benefitted as well. Think about it. With Jesus Christ doing this, not only is He enabling all the rest of mankind to have a chance at salvation, remember, He marries the church. They become the bride of Christ and become His spouse for all eternity. This makes that possible. He gains a wife from enduring this whole ugly experience. God the Father winds up with a greatly expanded family as a result. Ultimately everybody wins in the long run.

In the short run, it was an unpleasant, painful experience for everyone. Nobody would say, "Oh, I'm looking forward to that." It was a dreadful experience that no one would want to go through. But in the end, it worked out for the benefit of all those involved.

Think about it like this. Remove from this story that positive ending that we know about. What you have then is just a Father who knowingly turned over His son to be wrongfully arrested, tortured and then murdered while He had full power to stop it the entire time. If you take away that positive ending, what do you have? You have a sadistic act of cruelty. Would anyone look at a father who did that and say, "That's a loving father." We call it love because of the ultimate good that resulted. This was the motivation of why God the Father did this, because He knew the result would be for good.

If we want to understand about Godly love, it's not about what feels good initially, because, we as physical human beings, tend to think of it that way. We tend to think of love in terms of what feels good and makes you feel warm and fuzzy and positive.

No, God defines His love in terms of law. His law is all about living a righteous life where the end result, the fruits, you might say, turn out positive. That's what this is all about. If we're judging it by how something feels on the front end, we get deceptive conclusions, and we will not understand things properly. We will make wrong decisions. Godly love is defined in terms of how it turns out.

Often, in our physical logic, we think of law and love as being in opposition to each other. God's word tells us that. Why does love grow cold? Because lawlessness abounds. When you reject His law, that's when love goes cold. Love isn't about what feels good on the front end, it's about what it all results in, and how it turns out for all

those involved in the long run. That's what God defines as love. It's in our best interest and in the best interest of all involved.

We have to understand this to be able to have an accurate view of God's plan, not only historically from examples in the Bible, but understanding how He works with us today in our physical lives, and even understanding His plan for the future. We must have an accurate version of what His love is to be able to understand it.

The reason I mention that; if you're familiar with the beliefs in the Protestant world today, often they will characterize the God of the Old Testament as harsh and mean and cruel. He wasn't loving, but Jesus Christ, He's loving and kind and good. In the Church of God, we kind of chuckle at that because that is the same being. Jesus Christ is the God of the Old Testament. You can't contrast them with each other. They're the same being.

The reason they come up with this is, oftentimes they look at examples of how God acts with Ancient Israel in the Old Testament, and they think this is mean and harsh. This isn't loving. This is bad in terms of how He acts. The reason is that they're using their definition of love.

Let's look at one of the most common examples used to kind of paint the God of the Old Testament as mean, bad, and not loving. That is Israel's conquest of the Promised Land. When God called Israel out of Egypt and had Moses lead them out towards the Promised Land, of course, after forty years of wandering in the wilderness, they finally end up taking over the Promised Land. However, they don't just walk in and take over a land that's empty, this land has people living in it, and they've been there for quite some time. God tells them to go in and conquer the land, and to kill everything that breathes. He commanded them to wipe these people out, and not intermix with them. They were commanded to destroy them and take over the land.

If you look at this from a superficial level, in other words, not understanding God's motive in all of this, this sounds like theft and genocide quite frankly. It's a story of conquest and going in and taking what these people have.

You have to understand the bigger picture of what was taking place here to understand why a God of love would do this. First of all, it's important to understand that God is the creator. He made the planet; He made all people. He owns everything. He has the right to decide who He gives what. He is also the God of justice. He is the one who, you might say, dispenses justice as He sees fit. That's important to understand in the story. However, it's also important to look at how this affected the parties involved and why God would make this type of decision.

First of all, turn to Deuteronomy 18. Let's get a realistic picture of what the people in the land of Canaan were like. Those who try to paint God in a very negative way often put it across that the Canaanites were peaceful people going about their lives in harmony with each other and with the land, etc. Then you have these evil Israelites that came and

took it all away from them. That's not an accurate picture of what was happening here. As we're about to see, one of the reasons that God carried His plan out this way and commanded Israel to conquer these people was dispensing justice against the Canaanites for their sinful lifestyle, because they were an evil people.

Deuteronomy 18:9. "When you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations.

10) There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire ... (NKJV)

Now, it's easy to read over that particular statement and not really realize what this is referring to. When it's referring to "*passing through the fire*," it's talking about child sacrifices. It was a common practice for the people in this area. They worshipped a pagan god named Molech. One of the things they would do is literally take young children and toss them alive into a fire as a sacrifice to Molech. Of course, this was a very gruesome death for the children. It was a common practice of theirs. That's why He is warning them. He's saying, "That's what these people do and I don't want you involved in this." Notice what else He describes:

9b) ... or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer,

10) or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead.

11) For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you. (NKJV)

This is one of the reasons He did this.

12) You shall be blameless before the LORD your God.

13) For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, the LORD your God has not appointed such for you. (NKJV)

Not only were they involved in child sacrifice, these people were very involved with demons. They worshipped demons, they sought demon involvement in their life, they took advice from soothsayers and diviners. Diviners were people that would call up demons for them. They had a very demonic culture. They were steeped in this.

It's important to understand that this is one of the reasons why God instructed Israel to do this, it's because of how evil these people were. Not only were they a people involved with demons and child sacrifice, they were also very perverted in other ways.

Let me summarize the context that leads up to the following scripture. If you have a New King James translation, you'll notice the subheading at the beginning of chapter 18 says: The laws of sexual morality. That's basically the majority of what this chapter is dealing with. This is going much farther than just typical fornication and adultery. It certainly outlaws those as well, but a lot of this chapter is dealing with various forms of

incest. It covers all of the options, you might say, in terms of making it clear that God doesn't want blood relatives or relatives by marriage other than spouses having sex with each other. He covers every angle with that. He also describes homosexuality and bestiality (having sexual relations with animals). He also then talks about their child sacrifices with Molech as well. Realize, this is what these people were involved in. God's not just making a laundry list to make sure they understand all the things He's telling them not to do, He's specifically covering all of this for a reason.

Leviticus 18:24. 'Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you. (NKJV)

In other words, all the perverted practices He's talked about prior in this chapter, these people were involved in. This was part of their culture.

25) For the land is defiled; therefore, I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants.

26) You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations, either any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells among you

27) (for all these abominations the men of the land have done, who were before you, and thus the land is defiled),

28) lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you.

29) For whoever commits any of these abominations, the persons who commit them shall be cut off from among their people.

30) 'Therefore you shall keep My ordinance, so that you do not commit any of these abominable customs which were committed before you, and that you do not defile yourselves by them: I am the LORD your God.' (NKJV)

The reason He is bringing this about is because this was a very demonic, very perverted, child murdering type of culture, and God is bringing His judgment upon them. This is why He is wiping them out. For their own good, He's bringing judgment upon them for their actions.

Also, think of it this way. Godly love is motivated by what is the ultimate outcome. What happens if God allows these people to continue living this lifestyle? Do you know what they're going to do? They will pervert multiple generations to come. They're going to have more children, and will raise them in the same evil lifestyle. We're way beyond people who just don't understand God's way of life, and are dabbling in sin. These are extremely perverted, twisted individuals. What would happen is, if they would continue in this, as it is said, "visiting the sins upon the third and fourth generation." That's what would happen. So, God is bringing this about ultimately for their own good as well.

Let's also look at this from the other angle, in regard to the Israelites. We can understand why God would bring this about in terms of how it affects the Canaanites, but if we also look at it from the point of view of the Israelites, what they've been asked

to do is not really a pleasant task. It's pretty gruesome to have to go in and wipe those people out and the bloody warfare that's going to take place. This is not a pleasant, feel-good thing that they are being told to do.

It's important to keep in mind that when God originally instructed them to take the Promised Land, His original plan was to drive the people out with stinging insects. He said, "I'll drive them out from before you and you won't have to fight. The first time after they leave Egypt, and they encounter an enemy, they immediately pick up arms and want to handle it the physical way. They wanted to do it their own way instead of trusting in God. So, then God works with them and says, "If you're going to insist on doing it this way, here's the rules of war and here's what you're going to have to do." So, He gives them the ugly task of having to go in and conquer the land, but He's also doing this in the extreme measures that He told them to do for their own protection. Notice in Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 7:1. "When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, 2) and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. (NKJV)

Now keep that in mind. It would be very easy for them to say, "We're going to show love, and we're going to be nice and show them mercy."

God said, "No, that's not in everyone's best interest. Don't do that."

3) Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son.

4) For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so, the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly.

5) But thus you shall deal with them: you shall destroy their altars, and break down their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire.

6) "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.

7) The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples;

8) but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

9) *“Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments;*

10) and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face.

11) Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them. (NKJV)

So, telling Israel to go into the Promised Land and show no mercy and kill everything that breathes, wipe out and destroy everything, that's a gruesome task. It's not warm, fuzzy and positive for anybody.

Notice why God was doing this. He told them, “If you allow these people to live, you're going to end up intermarrying with them, you'll intermix with them, and you will be perverted by their practices and take on their religions, worshiping their gods, and it will destroy everything I am trying to accomplish with you.” It would pervert their society and bring all these negative consequences upon them and also derail the plan of what God is trying to do for them. He is trying to make them a model nation that not only would be a great blessing to them, but they would be an example to all the nations around them. God was trying to accomplish a great deal of good with all of this. He knows that if He allows the pagan practices to infect the culture of Israel, it would destroy all of this. It would be bad for everyone concerned.

God's love is always more concerned with the ultimate outcome and the fruits of an action and what it leads to than how it feels on the front end. It would be easy for Israel to say, “We want to be nice and loving and show mercy to these people, because what God wants to do is mean and brutal.” That would result in the Israelites wanting to marry them. They could look at two young people and say, “We can't be against two young people in love. They have strong feelings for each other.”

If you know the history of Israel, that is what happened. They didn't end up wiping out all of the Canaanites, and they did intermarry with them. It did pervert their religion, and they ended up worshipping other gods, turning away from God and destroying what God was trying to accomplish with them.

We tend to look at love from the perspective of what feels good to us, particularly on the front end at the time it's happening. We're physical and we think very short term and temporary. We think of how it feels today. That is not how God looks at love. God is looking at the ultimate benefit for everyone in the long run. He's always more focused on the long-term consequences and fruits of an action than He is on how it feels initially.

We've looked at a couple of examples where God directly tells us that He did it out of love, but it didn't feel good initially. In following God's instructions, it would end very well for everyone involved.

It's important to understand on this subject of Godly love, that the opposite can be true as well. In other words, things that seem to feel very good and even motivated by love and compassion can wind up actually causing problems that end in catastrophe. In other words, what sounds and feels good to our physical minds, if we ignore God's instructions, we can have the opposite effect.

Let me give you a good example of that. To do that, I'll have to cover some general history to set the scene. I'm sure most all of you hearing this sermon are probably familiar with U.S. history in general. The United States of America became a nation in the late 1700s. For many years prior to that, the eastern coast of the U.S. were British colonies. Then came the War of Independence and then the U.S. became a separate nation. Even through those colonial years and for a hundred years into U.S. history, the concept of slavery was legal in this country. There was a common slave trade that took place throughout all of those years. There were a number of ethnic groups involved in the slave trade here, in terms of those who were brought as slaves. That's oftentimes not realized in U.S. history, but in reality, there were a number of groups involved. Probably one of the larger portions of the population that were involved in the slave trade were slaves brought over from Africa. They were brought here against their will under harsh conditions and forced into slavery. This was true legally throughout our culture for about a hundred years. In the 1860s we had a civil war and one of the things that resulted from that war was the abolishment of slavery. It was no longer legal to own slaves in the U.S. Particularly for those that were of African descent, the problems didn't end as a result of that. There were still a lot of racial issues, racial persecution and racial discrimination that took place for about a hundred years after that. Depending upon what area of the country you lived in and what exact timeframe you're talking about, there were various levels of discrimination, and you might even say persecution that lasted a number of years. In the 1960s, we had a civil rights movement that ended a lot of this. It transformed our laws and removed a lot of these issues.

The reason I give you this history is that I want you to see the difference of problems that were caused after this as compared to a group that suffered for about two hundred years of oppression. There was a lot of bad treatment and persecution that took place. However, I want you to see an example of problems that developed after this that were done in the name of love and compassion that even two hundred years of oppression couldn't cause. One of the things that took place in the 1960s is, while all this transformation was taking place with the civil rights movements, a lot of our laws changed.

Prior to that time, some of our main welfare programs excluded those of African descent. It was written into the laws that they weren't even eligible for some of the welfare programs, for example AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) was one of the main welfare programs in the U.S. for many years. Prior to the 1960s, they weren't even allowed to receive these because the laws were written to discriminate against the group. In the 1960s, this all changed, but it went way further than just allowing those of African descent to receive these programs. They actually made a major push to try to make these programs available to them, literally to the point of

sending out social workers in the larger metropolitan areas where there were larger black neighborhoods. They would send social workers door to door to make everyone aware of the programs that were available and to sign up as many as possible. Again, this was done in the name of love and compassion and to lift people out of poverty.

What happened in the long run was catastrophically negative. I do understand firsthand how some of these programs worked, because my first job out of Ambassador College I worked for the Texas Department of Human Services. I processed applications for the AFDC Program, for food stamps and for Medicaid. So, I saw firsthand the cultures developed from this. Unfortunately, one of the things as far as how these programs were administered, across the board for all those who received them, often what tended to take place with that is not just helping people through a difficult situation, but because of the way these programs were administered, often tended to discourage work and encourage single parenthood. They were basically subsidizing these behaviors.

What took place from the 1960s to today, statistically, is a frightening picture. I'm not trying to pick on a population, I'm comparing this with the African-American population, because you can compare all the harsh treatment that happened before that didn't cause these problems to what was caused by programs laid out in the name of love and compassion. The single parenthood rates from the 1940s and 1950s typically ranged between ten to fourteen percent. Today, if you look at it nationwide, the numbers are between seventy and seventy-five percent of the population. The family structure has been decimated. If you look specifically at your large inner-city areas where the focus was, the single parenthood rates there are typically ninety percent or higher. The family structure has been destroyed.

If you correlate that with other social problems, single parenthood seems to heavily correlate with poverty, crime, drug problems and major social problems. For clarity's sake, I'm not trying to say that every person that grows up in a single-parent home is going to become a criminal or drug addict. If you're familiar with my story, my parents divorced when I was eight years old and I basically grew up in a single-parent home. The statistics are undeniable in terms of how those issues correlate with each other. So, I want you to see the difference that's taken place here in terms of the problems that were created.

Often this social breakdown is referred to as, "a legacy of slavery." They look at these particular problems and say, "This historically has its roots in all the oppression that took place for several hundred years. However, statistics do not match that.

To illustrate this, let me quote from an article I pulled off the internet. This is from a site called, nationalreview.com. It was published on May 5, 2015. The title is: The Inconvenient Truth About Ghetto Communities' Social Breakdown. It's authored by Dr. Thomas Sowell. Dr. Sowell is a very well published author of a number of books and has a regular column on a number of conservative sites. He's in his 80s, and he's been a college professor for a number of our top universities in the U.S. He is African-American himself, so he takes interest in things that affect that community and has

written a lot about it. I will skip the first half of the article, but just so you understand what led up to what I'm about to read, what he addresses in the first half of this article is the racial riots that took place in 2015 in Ferguson, MO and Baltimore, MD. You're probably familiar with those issues. They were on the news quite a bit as they were happening. I quote:

The "legacy of slavery" argument is not just an excuse for inexcusable behavior in the ghettos. In a larger sense, it is an evasion of responsibility for the disastrous consequences of the prevailing social vision of our times, and the political policies based on that vision, over the past half century.

Anyone who is serious about evidence need only compare black communities as they evolved in the first 100 years after slavery with black communities as they evolved in the first 50 years after the explosive growth of the welfare state, beginning in the 1960s.

You would be hard-pressed to find as many ghetto riots prior to the 1960s as we have seen just in the past year, much less in the 50 years since a wave of such riots swept across the country in 1965.

We are told that such riots are a result of black poverty and white racism. But in fact — for those who still have some respect for facts — black poverty was far worse, and white racism was far worse, prior to 1960. But violent crime within black ghettos was far less.

Murder rates among black males were going down — repeat, down — during the much-lamented 1950s, while it went up after the much celebrated 1960s, reaching levels more than double what they had been before. Most black children were raised in two-parent families prior to the 1960s. But today the great majority of black children are raised in one-parent families.

Such trends are not unique to blacks, nor even to the United States. The welfare state has led to remarkably similar trends among the white underclass in England over the same period. Just read *Life at the Bottom*, by Theodore Dalrymple, a British physician who worked in a hospital in a white slum neighborhood.

You cannot take any people, of any color, and exempt them from the requirements of civilization — including work, behavioral standards, personal responsibility, and all the other basic things that the clever intelligentsia disdain — without ruinous consequences to them and to society at large.

Non-judgmental subsidies of counterproductive lifestyles are treating people as if they were livestock, to be fed and tended by others in a welfare state — and yet expecting them to develop as human beings have developed when facing the challenges of life themselves.

One key fact that keeps getting ignored is that the poverty rate among black married couples has been in single digits every year since 1994. Behavior matters and facts matter, more than the prevailing social visions or political empires built on those visions.

— Thomas Sowell is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

What he is getting at is when you subsidize unproductive behavior, basically sinful behavior; when you discourage work and encourage single parenthood, it's with bad results. But often we can look at an isolated situation and say, "Oh, this is love and compassion. We're doing good. We're giving to people. That's a good thing." However, we don't think in terms of the long-term consequences.

I'm not condemning everyone who ever received help through a welfare program. Not at all. I saw firsthand when I worked there, people who legitimately needed help. I also saw a culture that developed where young women came in where it was like a rite of passage into adulthood. They had their own welfare case in their own name and their own illegitimate children. "I'm an adult now. I now have my own welfare case." It wasn't isolated situations, it was a cultural phenomenon, because the sins of the fathers had been visited upon the third and fourth generation, and a whole culture had developed with disastrous results.

The Biblical principle on this subject is in 2 Thessalonians, chapter 3.

2 Thessalonians 3:6. *But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.*

7) *For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you;*

8) *nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you,*

9) *not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.*

10) *For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.*

11) *For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.*

12) *Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.*

13) *But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good.*

14) *And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed.*

15) *Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. (NKJV)*

Now understand, he is not condemning helping those who are in legitimate need. The same God that inspired this also developed the third tithe program and commanded

Israel to set aside resources to help those truly in need. That is a Christian responsibility, and something we should do. What he's talking about is not subsidizing destructive lifestyles. In other words, if someone is not willing to work, you don't facilitate that and subsidize it so that you get more of that behavior, because all that you end up doing is hurting a whole lot more people.

Again, it's easy to think of this in terms of being compassionate and we want to help and be giving. However, you don't do that if that giving is going to be destructive to that person. He's not just saying, "Don't subsidize their bad behavior." He's saying if they have a track record of being disorderly (not doing what they can to support themselves) then basically it's a principle of being disfellowshipped. You ostracize them and you don't keep company with them until they repent of this behavior.

Again, it's easy for us to think of it in terms of how something feels on the front end, and not in terms of the results that can take place. As Dr. Sowell pointed out, in the U.S. and numerous countries where you develop a welfare state and you start subsidizing this bad behavior, when you do this for multiple generations, you get catastrophic results. The reason I pointed this out again, specifically how it has affected the African-American community, is because two hundred years of oppression and discrimination and a hundred years of slavery didn't destroy the family structure the same way that fifty years of programs instituted in the name of love and compassion did. This is why we have to think of Godly love not in terms of how it feels on the front end, but in terms of the results, how it ends. What are the long-term fruits? That's what really defines love, because God's perspective is how it works out in the long run.

This is not only true historically in looking at how God has worked with His people. It's very important for us to understand today in our daily lives. Often when we think of a loving God and how God will take care of us, sometimes we get the notion that if God loves me, that means He will always protect me from pain. That means He will take all the problems out of my life, because that's what love would be. God doesn't look at it that way. If you read through the New Testament, God literally refers to blessings as trials, things that we think of as something painful that we want to avoid and don't want to go through. He says to count it all for joy, it's a blessing for us. Again, not because of how it feels now, but because of what it will result in.

In 1 Peter, chapter 4, we can see that this is a normal expectation for a Christian life. The Bible refers to this as suffering as Christ has suffered, and it makes it very clear in the New Testament, that this is a requirement for salvation. It tells us that we will be glorified with Him if we suffer as He suffered. This is fundamental to the process of Christianity.

1 Peter 4:12. *Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; (NKJV)*

In other words, don't think that this is odd. A fiery trial isn't an "if," it's a "when." It's going to happen. It's part of how the contract works.

- 13) but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.*
- 14) If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part, He is blasphemed, but on your part, He is glorified.*
- 15) But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. (NKJV)*

Suffering because of our sins, when we brought it upon ourselves with our own actions, that's not suffering as Christ suffered. In chapter 2 of the same book, it clearly defines what suffering as Christ suffered means. It means suffering even when you've been righteous. In spite of the fact that you've been obedient, you're still facing harsh trials.

- 16) Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.*
- 17) For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?*
- 18) Now, "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"*
- 19) Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator. (NKJV)*

It's important for us to realize that this is a fundamental requirement in the process for salvation. In other words, part of the contract that we signed when we were baptized, the concept of counting the cost, that was part of the whole process. You were signing a contract that required you to suffer and endure to the end. If it was a contract where you just obey God, and everything will go wonderful for you, who wouldn't sign up for that? Why would you need to count the cost on that one, because it's all benefit for you? There's no downside to struggle through. The reason you count the cost is because it's going to be difficult, and there's suffering involved and you have to endure that.

Now, the ultimate end is very positive. It ends very well, with a very warm and fuzzy picture, but that doesn't mean that it's not difficult with harsh trials in the meantime to get to that part. That's a normal expectation.

If we have this definition of love, that love is always what feels good and makes me feel happy and positive and warm and fuzzy, then when you face harsh trials, it becomes very disillusioning. You're like: What happened? Where did God go? Does He not love me anymore? That's because, again, the definition of love that we're using is that love is supposed to feel good. It's supposed to take all the pain away and make everything positive. That's not what He says in the New Testament. He says that you'll ultimately wind up there when we get to the kingdom, but it's going to be hard through this life because this is what is required for us to develop the mind of God.

Think about it like this, we started off the sermon asking what sums up the very mind of God. It's agape love. What's the first definition that 1 Corinthians 13 uses to tell us what agape love is? It suffers long and is kind. How do you do that if you don't suffer long? By definition, you can't. That's how the contract works.

Not only is this important to understand in looking at how God has worked with people in the Old Testament and the New Testament that are recorded as examples for us, it's important in our Christian lives today. It's also important for us to understand as we look forward to the future.

I find it interesting, even for those in the Protestant world who see the God of the Old Testament as a harsh, cruel God, but Jesus Christ is loving and compassionate and merciful, even if you fall for that argument, you still have to deal with the Book of Revelation. The reason I say that is if you read Revelation, chapter 1, what does it tell us? It's the revelation of Jesus Christ. John is the one who wrote it down, but who delivered the content to John? Jesus Christ did. Therefore, who is the author of the Day of the Lord? It's Jesus Christ. He is the author and orchestrator of the most horrific events in the history of mankind. You read through that on Trumpets, and it's hard to even wrap your head around just how awful and catastrophic this is going to be. Then you ask: This is the warm and loving God, the poster child for love and compassion and gentleness and kindness? Yes, this is the loving God who is orchestrating all of this. But why would He do that? That doesn't sound like love. That sounds mean and cruel and harsh. Well, keep in mind the generation He is dealing with.

As Paul tells us in his writings: In the last days, perilous times will come. One of the things on that list is despisers of good. In other words, He's dealing with a generation of people that these events come upon. They don't just love their sin; they literally hate what is good. That is how bent they are on doing evil.

This is a situation where the two witnesses are on the scene, several years prior to this, performing dramatic miracles and getting everyone's attention. It's hard to ignore these two. When you can call down fire from heaven and stop the rain and turn water into blood, it's hard to ignore this. There is credibility to what they say, and they're constantly telling people that they need to repent and turn to God. As they predict, these things keep happening. They have a good track record through all of this. In spite of all of this, what do we read in Revelation? All the survivors blasphemed God. They refused to repent, and they kept doing their own thing. Even when Christ and the first fruits come down to the Mount of Olives, what do they do? They take up their guns and go to fight them to the death. During all of this, they're told to, "Repent and turn to God, and things will go much better for you. All you have to do is go away from the Beast, and submit to God's authority." However, they want to fight Christ to the death. These are the people He is dealing with.

For their own good, He has to bring about judgment for their evil behavior. He's also trying to usher in the Millennium, a thousand years of a wonderful and peaceful

environment. You can't do it with people that are bent on doing evil. It's for the ultimate good of everyone involved.

Again, it's a very brutal situation when you read through the gory details, but Godly love is defined by how the movie ends, not by how it feels on the front end.

If we look at God's plan, we get to a thousand years of a wonderful utopian environment. This is how we picture love, isn't it? Everything is great, the weather is good, everyone is healthy and everything is positive and upbeat. It's warm and fuzzy just to read about it and talk about it. It feels great.

Then God does something very puzzling. Turn to Revelation, chapter 20. In the first three verses, we see an event that we all greatly look forward to. It's the fulfilment of the Day of Atonement, the binding of Satan. He is taken out of the picture for a thousand years. It says that he was taken away so he could not deceive the nations anymore. We know what that means today. He affects the entire world. However, just after the thousand years, let's read verse 7 and see what God does after this thousand years of a wonderful environment.

Revelation 20:7. *Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison
8) and will go out to deceive the nations [same wording] which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. (NKJV)*

He's referring to the Gog and Magog battle that we see recorded in the book of Ezekiel in much more detail.

Now this is one of those puzzling events that we in the Church of God even scratch our head over and think, why would He do that? You read through the description of the Millennium. It's this wonderful, positive environment where everything is good and peaceful and happy and uplifting. It sounds fantastic. Why would you then turn around and sabotage it and give the bad guy his old job back? This seems crazy. It seems mean. Why would a loving God do that? The answer is really not difficult. He does this for the same reason He leaves him out today. Just think of it like that.

Think of the picture that we have today. Satan affects the world today and we have to overcome him as part of the process of salvation, don't we?

We're not dealing with a God who is wearing handcuffs for six thousand years and really wants to take Satan out of the picture, but He doesn't have permission to do so. Then He finally gets the chance to do it, and He then gets rid of him. Well, if that's the case, why would He lose His mind a thousand years later and let him back out again? It doesn't make sense.

If you read Job, chapter 41, what does it tell us? He has a hook in Leviathan's nose. Leviathan is Satan. He has a leash on him like a dog. He's in total control. He has taken him as a servant. He uses him as part of His plan.

If you read through the New Testament, it's about what Satan's role is. He provides the suffering for us. He provides the temptation that we have to overcome. Striving against that does what? It builds the mind and character of God in us. That's how we develop to become what God wants us to be in order to be in His kingdom. He is doing this for the same reason.

To understand all of this, we have to get beyond the idea that love just feels good. It's always what is happy and positive and makes us feel warm and fuzzy.

When we read about the Millennium, that's just fantastic. Who wouldn't want to live in that world?

So, why would God do this? He does it for the same reason He has Satan around today and why He tolerates him. It's because of the ultimate good that will be the result, and what it develops in us. That's how we need to understand Godly love. It's not in terms of how it feels when we're going through it, it's in terms of the ultimate good that it results in for everyone involved.

This is why Godly love is defined in terms of law, because love and law are not in opposition to each other. God's laws are the rules, and it doesn't make us feel good with all these do's and don'ts of what you can't do. However, if you follow that, it ultimately results in good for everyone and, you might say, in a warm, fuzzy, positive, encouraging picture. That's where we ultimately wind up, because that's the objective. He sends us through these harsh trials that we may be glorified with Him. You will be glorified with Him if you suffer as He suffered. You go through that so that you get the ultimate good, positive and uplifting outcome. That outcome is foretold for us in Revelation, chapter 21.

We go through this life and we face all of these things and we have to have our hope ultimately in how the story ends. This life isn't easy. Overcoming as a Christian and all the trials we face and the difficulties that we go through, they don't feel good and they're not enjoyable. It's kind of like what Christ was going through when He knew what He was about to suffer. He pleaded, "God please! Is there some way I don't have to go through this? This doesn't sound fun. I'm not looking forward to it. I'd really like to skip all of this." God did it anyway. Why? Because of the ultimate positive outcome.

That's how this story ultimately does end for us. We do wind up getting the feel good, happy ending, as I like to call it, where they all live happily ever after. That happens when we all get to God's kingdom. That's where everything feels good and is positive for all eternity. That is foretold for us in Revelation, chapter 21.

Revelation 21:1. *Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also, there was no more sea. (NKJV)*

That's because there are no more humans. We don't need oxygen anymore.

2) Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

3) And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.

4) And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." (NKJV)

This is the ultimate happy ending, that if we successfully endure to the end, we all get to enjoy. That's the important thing to keep in mind. Again, we tend to look at love in terms of what feels good to us today, or we look at how it feels on the front end. That is not the way God looks at love. God looks at love in terms of how it's going to end and what are the long-term ramifications, and what are the fruits of a particular action. That's why He sends us through these difficult trials. That's why He does things that seem puzzling to us, because it doesn't feel good on the front end; His whole perspective is in that ultimate outcome.

When we finally get to the end of God's plan, all those who refuse to go along with the program are thrown into the lake of fire. Everyone who obeyed God and embraced His mind and His way of life become God beings who no longer have to suffer any physical pain. Then there's no more tears, no more crying, no more death and no more sorrow. We finally get to that feel good happy ending where they all live happily ever after.