

Godly Love is Not an Emotion

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If I were to ask any of you to sum up, in a sentence or maybe a word, the very nature and character of God, how would you answer that question? If you think of how to sum up God's character—the very character that we are all striving for in our own lives, how would you describe that? I'm willing to bet if I asked that question, most of you out there hearing this would have a one-word answer for that. In fact, you would probably turn to the same scripture that we're going to turn to in a minute in 1 John 4 and you would read right off the page where it says *God is love*. In fact, that's probably not just the answer that most church of God members would give, but if you asked the average professing Christian, they would probably also give you the exact same answer.

If you tried to operationalize that—in other words what does that look like—and put that into practice, you will find their definition of that is different than what the Bible actually describes—if we look at it in detail. The reason I mention that is, the way we use the word *love* in the English language—if you think about—we talk about loving someone or being in love with someone. Sometimes we may talk about a particular hobby that we just love to do; we really enjoy this particular thing. Or we might talk about a vacation spot that we just really enjoy going to—*I just love going to that place; I have so much fun when I go there*. When you think about the commonality in the ways we use the term *love*, we normally use it in regard to things that give us very positive feelings. That gives us positive emotions, makes us experience joy in our lives—those are the things we associate with love.

Things that might cause us pain or displeasure and make life difficult and painful, we typically don't associate that with *love*. We think of *love* in terms of positive emotions. What we're going to see today, if we look at how the Bible defines love, the primary example it gives to demonstrate God's love, it's not defined in terms of positive emotions. Let's take a deeper look at this subject today to understand the very nature and character of God and the very nature and character that we are supposed to be developing in our own lives. To understand not only God's nature, but to correctly understand how He's worked with mankind in the past, how He works with us today, and how He's going to work with mankind in the future, it is very pivotal that we have an accurate, biblical definition of love and not one we got from our own human reasoning and emotion.

If you would like a definition for this sermon it's:

Godly Love is Not an Emotion

As I mentioned, as carnal human beings, we typically tend to define this subject of love in terms of positive emotions. Things that make us feel happy, make us feel good and joyful—that's our association with it. What we're going to see is that is not really how the

Bible defines it. First turn to 1 John 4. When I ask the question, how would you sum up the very character of God, this is probably the verse that came immediately to your mind.

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)

That is straight out of the Bible, to sum up the very character and nature of God, the word *love*—or as it is in Greek, *agape*—the spiritual form of *love*, is how God's character is defined. It defines His very existence. But now let's notice what it gives us as the chief example of that love. We're going to dig into this in detail at the beginning of this sermon, to see that this defies our association with love always being associated with positive, happy, good times. Continue in verse 9.

9) In this the love of God was manifested toward us, 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)

Notice it's giving us the chief example of God's love—the fact that He sent Christ to die for the sins of mankind. It's easy to see, if you look at this from a longterm outcome perspective, why this is such a good thing. But what I want you to understand as we go through this sermon, the difference between how something is experienced on the front end when it's initially happening, versus the long-term outcome. We're going to see that *Godly love* is defined by the longterm outcome. If you have listened to a lot of my sermons over the years, I like to sum it like this: *Godly love* is not defined by the question, "Does it feel good?" it's defined by the question, "Does it do good?" As we're going to see, there are a lot of things that God defines as *love* that don't feel good on the front end—they don't seem positive, warm and fuzzy, and happy on the front end—it's the longterm outcome that results in it being *love*. The longterm outcome is a positive thing.

To see this mentioned again, turn to John 3, a very common scripture, in verse 16. This is going back several decades ago but I know, probably in the early 90's it was common that if you watched major sporting events on TV, like the Super Bowl or the World Series, you would often see shots of the crowd and there would be someone holding up a sign that said John 3:16—*that God loved the world*. You'll even see in the Protestant world when they talk about God or Christ, because they think in the trinity and meld them together, they talk about how God loves you—and that is true—but they focus on the warm and fuzzy definition of 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)*

Again, the chief example of God's love—the pinnacle example—is that He gave Christ to be the sacrifice for mankind. Let's think this through on both sides of the equation. I want you to see the contrast between what it looks like on the front end and what it looks like in the long-term outcome, because they are very different. What you have is, if you look at the two parties involved, you have God the Father and Jesus Christ being addressed but let's look at it from both of their perspectives. For God the Father, He is giving His Son to be falsely arrested, taken captive, tortured and brutally murdered. It's an utterly painful, ugly experience. Think of that from the perspective of a human parent—that's something that us physical human beings can relate to. It is said that one of the most painful things a person can go through is the death of one of their children. Most everybody at some point experiences the death of their parents—that's the normal course of life; children typically outlive their parents because it's the normal cycle of life. That can be a very painful thing for a person to lose their parents but it's the normal expectation.

Sometimes it happens the other way around and that is particularly, brutally painful, for a parent to lose their child. Or for a parent watch their child go through some gruelingly hard trial of a health problem or some type of painful situation that they are going through. You will hear parents in that situation express the desire of taking it on themselves. I could spare my child from having to go through this. It could be me suffering this and my child could be protected. It's a very painful thing for a parent to watch their child go through. If we focus on what's taking place here, on the front end, that's what this looks like. That's what this looks like for God the Father.

To understand what it was like for Christ, we can read His own account of what took place. In Matthew 26 we'll read the account where Christ has already had the final Passover service with His apostles and it's in between that and when He's actually arrested and taken prisoner.

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. (NKJV)*

Notice this is gruelingly painful for Him because He is very familiar with what the book of Isaiah prophesied about what is going to happen to Him. This isn't a surprise to Him about what He is about to go through. He knows in graphic detail what He is about to face. This explains the stress He is going through.

*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." (NKJV)*

He's begging for a plan B. Is there some other way to accomplish this purpose and I don't have to go through this gruelingly, ugly experience because I'm not looking forward to this. Pick up in verse 40.

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.

45) Then He came to His disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.

46) Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand." (NKJV)

He knows in graphic detail what He is about to go through and He is not looking forward to this. He is begging and pleading for a plan B. What I want you to see on all sides of the equation. The Father is giving the sacrifice, Christ is the sacrifice but both parties are involved. This is an ugly, brutally painful, experience to go through. It's not something we typically associate with love. It's not something that is warm and fuzzy and happy and gives us a good day. This is a nightmare experience that everyone wants to avoid.

Let's understand again, why is this considered love? Turn back to John 3, where we started, and we're going to read verse 16 again and then verse 17 which explains to us why this is such a wonderful act of love. So far, it just looks like a brutally, ugly experience that nobody would want to go through.

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.*

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)

If you look at the long-term outcome, it's a totally different picture—Christ being willing to go through this—we saw that in His own words,

"If there is no other way around this, I'll bite the bullet and I'll do it because I know it's for the ultimate good. But man, I don't want to do this."

He knew in the long term that He was going to be the sacrifice that enabled salvation to be offered to all mankind. A massive good is accomplished from this. In fact, both parties who were going through this very ugly experience, also win in this as well. Christ gets a wife out of the deal—He winds up ultimately marrying the church, that's

described in Revelation 19, we become the bride of Christ. The Firstfruits get to marry Him, so He gains a wife out of the deal. The Father expands His family and is able to share His plan with all of mankind who are willing to overcome and make it into His Kingdom. There are huge benefits that come out of this. Keep in mind, it wasn't how it felt when it was happening. It wasn't that it was warm and fuzzy on the front end, it did good. It ultimately ended well and that's the key to understanding the love of God.

We're going to see examples, not only historically—looking at how God worked with Ancient Israel in the past—we're going to look at how He works with us today and how He will work with mankind in the future. The key to properly understanding all of this is the biblical definition of love. It's not about does it feel good. It's not, does it give us warm, fuzzy, happy feelings—it's what is the ultimate outcome. We'll start out looking historically. One of the things people can really struggle with in understanding God—in fact you'll hear this from the Protestant world—that God in the Old Testament is brutal and mean and they see Him as cruel. This has nothing to do with the church of God debate as to who is the God of the Old Testament and whether that was God the Father who dealt with mankind or Christ—that's really not the issue because in their view it's a trinitarian blog together. But they look at this and struggle with that God in the Old Testament—He's just this mean and cruel and awful individual but Jesus is love and kindness and they can't understand this. One of the reasons why is because of the whole picture of the instructions that Israel was given when they conquered the Promised Land. They were to go into these cities and were given the instructions to just wipe everything out. Kill everything that breathes and thoroughly wipe out everything that is there. This is just a very brutal, difficult thing to look at. To understand the full perspective, we have to look at it from a bigger picture—a long-term perspective of it all.

First, we have to understand just how evil the people were that God was driving out of the land and telling the Israelites to wipe out. It's important to understand that. Often this gets characterized as just a different culture and they had different beliefs and were living in harmony with themselves and the land—this is a fairytale picture of it—and these evil Israelites just came in and pushed them around and wiped them out. That's not the picture that the Bible paints. In Deuteronomy 18, we'll look at a couple of scriptures to get an accurate picture of what the culture of these people was like and why God would do something as brutal as telling the Israelites to wipe this culture out entirely. We want to understand a synopsis of what the culture of these people in the land of Canaan was really like.

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.*
(NKJV)

Let's get an idea of what those abominations are.

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

What He's referring to here—we'll read this again in a minute in Leviticus 18—is child sacrifice to the pagan god Molech. It was a common practice at the time where they would take infant children and toss them into a hot fire as a religious sacrifice to their pagan god Molech. They were brutally murdering children—that's what we're seeing—this was a common practice in their culture.

10 continued) ... or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer ... (NKJV)

In other words, this is a very demonic culture. This is a demon-worshipping, very demonically influenced culture. We're not talking about just a basic, carnal, misguided people. These are people who are very bent on evil.

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

12) 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.

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

14) 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)

He's wiping them out because of their evil practices, but He also doesn't want them to be a source of contamination to the Israelites. He knew that's what would happen; that's what would be the long-term effect if He didn't wipe them out. To get more detail on this, turn to Leviticus 18:21 but I'll summarize the first half of this chapter. If you have a New King James version like myself, it typically has subheadings that are added throughout the Bible. At the beginning of chapter 18 it has the subhead of "Laws of Sexual Morality". That's the primary focus of chapter 18 and most of the first half goes into describing incest from every possible combination that you can have. Not only was this a very incestuous culture, you can easily see that if you have incest at this level—again, it covers basically every combination of incest that you could have, and you'll see in the later part of the chapter, He directly says, "All of these people you are going to dispossess, they engage in all of this". So basically, this is their common practice. So not only are they a child-murdering culture that throws their babies in the fire to Molech, they are a child molesting culture as well. When you have that level of incest you can obviously assume you have underage sexual abuse going on as well. It's a very perverted culture. What we're about to read here is another reference to Molech, where we're going to read about bestiality—this was a very perverted society. Pick up in verse 21.

Leviticus 18:21 *And you shall not let any of your descendants pass through the fire to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the LORD. (NKJV)*

This was another reference to child sacrifice, which was taking infant children and burning them alive—throwing them into a furnace of fire—as a religious sacrifice.

22) You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination. (NKJV)

In other words, homosexuality and lesbianism was common—the whole gender confusion was very common in their culture.

23) Nor shall you mate with any animal, to defile yourself with it. Nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it. It is perversion. (NKJV)

Bestiality—they commonly had sex with animals. These people have no boundaries and no sense of normalcy whatsoever.

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)

That directly tells you all the different types of incest and other issues that are covered in the first part of the chapter—He is saying they do all of this, I'm not just listing this to be thorough, this is common practice among these people.

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)

You can see this was not just your regular, carnal people who just don't really understand the right ways and don't know when the Sabbath is and maybe they keep Christmas and Easter and they are misguided in some ways but are good-hearted people. That's not who He was wiping out. This was a people who were just evil in every way you can imagine. They were demon worshippers, they were child sacrificers, they were child molesters, they were just rotten to the core. He was wiping them out for their own good. If you look at it from the society of these people, think about a culture that is that bent on evil; that is evil in everything they do. What are they doing? They are indoctrinating their children, generation after generation, visiting the sins of the fathers upon the third and fourth generation—that's what was happening. They were an

indoctrination center to create more and more people who were this warped and twisted.

The other problem was—remember God had a great plan for Israel when He sent them into the Promised Land—He not only wanted to bless them as the descendants of Abraham, He wanted them to be a model nation to be an example to the rest of the world. He ideally was looking for other nations to be able to look at them and say those folks are doing something right. We need to go find out what they're doing right and why things go so well for them and He wanted them to inquire,

“Who is the God of Israel? He sure is treating you guys well, maybe we should worship Him too.”

That was the objective. He knew if they stayed in an environment with these kinds of people, the clock was ticking on that being destroyed. That was what was eventually going to happen. This is what He warns them about in Deuteronomy 7:1.

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. (NKJV)*

Completely wipe them out. You're going to see as we continue, He is saying

“Don't try to make friends with them, don't intermarry with them, don't make covenants with them. Don't think this is the nice approach where we're going to be nice and kind—just wipe them out and get that environment away from you because it's poisonous.”

2 continued) ... You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. (NKJV)

In other words, don't think we're going to do the nice and loving thing with them. The loving thing, in this case, is to wipe them out.

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. (NKJV)

That's the reason why. He's looking at the long-term outcome.

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. (NKJV)

Wipe out their whole culture. Don't take any of it because it's poison.

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)

He's directly saying that He is merciful and loving but He's also just with those who are just bent on evil. That's what He's dishing out here. He's dishing out justice on those who were just bent on evil, who worship demons, who burn their children in fire, who molest their children, who have sex with animals. They are just evil in every way possible and He's saying, they are getting their just results for this. They are getting the reward for their behavior. But He also understands what a negative influence this would be upon the Israelites. What do we know from the history of Ancient Israel of what actually happened? They didn't follow these instructions; they didn't wipe all of them out. They got partially there and then decided they should be nice to the people and should work with them and coexist with them. So, they decided to do the—*carnal definition of love*—being a nice guy? How did it turn out? They wound up intermarrying with the people and it turned out just like this chapter describes. They started worshiping their gods, taking on their practices and what happened? It perverted the culture of Israel and eventually they totally turned away from God, had to go into captivity numerous times and eventually got carried off the land because it totally turned their hearts against Him.

When God gave these instructions, it wasn't because it was warm and fuzzy and positive and gave everyone warm, fuzzy emotions on the front end. No, it was pretty ugly on the front end, it's pretty brutal. He's looking at the long-term outcome of how it would turn out and if they didn't follow these instructions, it would be disastrous to the whole plan and it eventually was, because they didn't follow the instructions and it turned out badly just like He said it would. What we've seen here from this example is

that oftentimes the biblical definition of love can be things that don't feel very good on the front end but it's loving and a positive thing because of the long-term outcome. It's important to understand that the opposite can be true as well. There are things we can do because it feels good on the front end—because it seems like the loving, nice thing to do on the front end—but in the end it's a catastrophic disaster. It's illustrating this same point where you need to look at the long-term outcome.

To set up the example, I need to summarize a bit of American history and you'll understand in a minute why I'm doing this. It's important to have the full context to understand the example I'm about to point to. If you're familiar at all with the history of the United States, the U.S. declared independence and became a separate nation—basically broke away from being a British colony in the late 1700's. That's when the U.S. officially became a nation. For about the first 100 years of the existence of the U.S., slavery was actually legal in the United States. That was a common practice throughout many of the states of the U.S. Unfortunately, a lot of people don't know this in our current history because so much of it is focused on a racial narrative, but there were numerous racial groups that were victims of slavery. There were people of numerous ethnic backgrounds who were slaves in the U.S. at the time that it was legal. It was predominantly tended to affect those from an African background. If you look at it, population wise, that was the largest population affected by it.

In the 1800's there was a civil war fought in the U.S.—in the 1860's—and one of the things that came out of that was basically making slavery illegal. Now it was no longer legal to own another human being as property and to mistreat them like that. Particularly for those with an African American lineage background, this didn't end the oppression that this racial group experienced in the U.S. For the next 100 years, depending on what area of the U.S. you lived in, there was a lot of mistreatment and racial discrimination that took place, even up to the 1960's. I'm not saying all of that is completely gone in every aspect, but in our nation as a whole, our laws up to the 1960's explicitly discriminated and oppressed these individuals. The reason I'm making this example is, I want you to see the contrast between 200 years of slavery and direct racism and oppression and the damage that that did as compared to 50 plus years of the welfare state that was instituted in the 1960's out of good intentions. Out of an idea that we are doing something positive and good. Slavery and racial oppression was not done out of an intention of trying to be nice to people. That was knowingly mistreating individuals and justifying it. But no one does that out of trying to be loving and kind.

What was instituted in the 1960's to the welfare programs was often done out of the desire to be nice. But the results ultimately did the exact opposite. What I want you to see, when I mention the welfare programs, prior to the 1960's the laws in the U.S. for some of the welfare programs such as what was called *Aid to Families with Dependent Children* (AFDC) the laws were written where it excluded African Americans and they couldn't receive these benefits. This significantly changes in the 1960's with the Civil Rights Movement. Then there was a major push to go overboard with this. They had programs where they sent social workers, into particularly large urban areas where there was a high African American population, to go door to door trying to inform people

of benefits they should be aware of and to try to sign up as many people as possible. The way these programs were designed unfortunately encouraged single parenthood and discouraged work. I can speak firsthand to that and the reason I say that is, in the 1990's, right after I graduated from Ambassador College, I worked for the Texas Department of Human Services. I processed welfare claims for the AFDC program—that's now been completely restructured in recent years—but in 1993 when I started working there that program was still intact. I would process claims for AFDC for food stamps and the Medicaid program. I got to see the culture that came about as a result of this. It was a very dysfunctional program because the way the rules were written, it discouraged work and encouraged single parenthood. What I want you to understand is, if you look at statistics you see a devastating effect that took place. If you look at single parenthood statistics in the 1940's and '50's in the U.S. among the African American population, there were typically children born to a single parent where mom and dad were not married. It was typically between 10-14% of that population. That was about equal to what you would see in the white population. In fact, in the 1950's, if you look at it statistically, if you were a child born in the U.S. to a Black family, you were slightly more likely to be born into a two-parent family than you were if you were born into a white family. Today the results are dramatically different. Today if you're a child born into a Black family, 70-75% is the chance that you'll be born into a single parent family. In some larger urban areas, it's more like 90%.

To share with you some more detail on this, the whole dynamic just described in these statistics, often gets brushed aside with the term a legacy of slavery. In other words, people look back and say that's just from the history of slavery and the oppression these people have faced—that's what has caused the destruction of the family structure. But statistics don't match that. Through 200 years of slavery and blatant racial discrimination, even in the 1950's, the single parent rate—the illegitimacy rate—was about 10-14%. Today it's 75% or more. The statistics don't match that narrative at all. To further back this up I'd like to quote from an article I pulled off the internet from a site called nationalreview.com. The author is Dr. Thomas Sowell. The article is a few years old, from May 5, 2015. I'm going to read the second half of the article. In the first half he's addressing the Black Lives Matter riots that took place in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014 and in Baltimore, Maryland in 2015. That was around the time when that organization was getting kicked off, long before the 2020 riots that we saw where they were burning down cities all over the nation. He addresses that in the first half and I'm going to pick up in the second half of the article because he's talking about how the legacy of the slavery issue does not explain the issues that these communities are dealing with.

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, [he's referring to 2014 and 2015 in this context] 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.

What he's pointing out here is that programs like the welfare system—I'm not condemning welfare as a general practice, God Himself establishes a third tithe system and what it was intended for; for the widows, the fatherless and those who needed help—God is not against that by any means. What He is against is subsidizing bad behavior because that's what this became. The way these programs were promoted and the way the rules were written, it wound up discouraging work and encouraging single parenthood. It all started out with good intentions and that's what I want you to see in this. It's easy to look at this and say, these are mistreated people and we should help them out and do good. It's not a bad thing to want to help people who have been mistreated and had a hard time in life—that's a good thing to do. But we have to be careful how you do something like this because we have to think what the long-term outcome involved. That's what happened here, there wasn't thought in terms of what is the long-term effect of this result. It's the opposite of examples I gave you before where something that is very brutal and painful on the front end and you think that's just awful, but the long-term outcome is a positive thing. This is the opposite where it looks very positive and looks like it's kind and loving on the front end and look at the long-term effects and realize this was a disaster, it wound up hurting way more people than it helped. The biblical principle that this is based upon—turn to 2 Thessalonians—we'll see Paul himself sums up the biblical principle that ties to all of this.

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. (NKJV)*

If we keep reading, we'll understand what tradition he's talking about.

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. (NKJV)

He's referring to subsidizing people who refuse to work, is what he's talking about.

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)

It's easy to look at a situation and say, this person is doing without and we need to help them; we need to subsidize them and be kind. And again, if there is a legitimate need that is definitely what we should do if we can help others. But if you have a person that refuses to work, who just keeps making bad decisions and just keeps getting themselves in self-inflicted problems, it's not like they are in a situation of circumstances beyond their control that put them in a rough situation and you're going to help them out—that's a good thing we should always be willing to do. But if you have someone who refuses to work, who is just being lazy and refuses to take responsibility, let them face the consequences. If the consequences get painful enough, they will reexamine their behavior and not want to continue in the bad behavior they have been following. That's the principle he's talking about here. It's easy to look at that and think we need to be kind and nice. It makes people feel good on the front end but you have to think about the long-term ramifications and are we creating more problems than we're solving. That's what happened with the example I gave with the welfare system. It wasn't just helping people climb out of oppression so they could have productive lives, what we wound up doing as a result of this was creating a welfare culture of entire communities.

I actually experienced this firsthand, as I mentioned one of my first jobs out of Ambassador College was working for the Texas Department of Human Services. As a

young kid who grew up in a farming community in the south and then went to AC and then moved to Dallas, it was a shock to my system to see human nature at its ugliest. I would see circumstances where young girls were coming in to apply for the welfare programs and often their parents were with them and I could watch the dynamics and see there was a culture where she is an adult now, it's a rite of passage, she has her own welfare case with her own illegitimate children. It's not looked as, we're trying to make the best of a bad situation, it was like now you're into adult and you have your own welfare case under your own name. I would watch this and say, "This is nuts." You realize it's gone beyond trying to help people out of a rough situation, you have created a dysfunctional culture that encourages this and then the sins of the fathers are passed on to the third and fourth generations. You go from a 10-14% illegitimacy rate to over a 70%. The results were a disaster. You always have to look at the long-term outcome.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this sermon, this whole concept of understanding biblical love—it's not about the warm, fuzzy feelings that we often associate love with, it's about *does it do good rather than does it feel good*. We've looked at an historical example—understanding how God operated in the past with Ancient Israel; you have to look through those eyes to properly understand it. The same is true for our lives today. We're going to look at how God works with us today and how He will work with mankind in the future. We know God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He uses the same definition of love all the time. That's important for us because people go into Christianity and think, as long as I obey God, He's going to protect me from all pain. Everything is going to work out as long as I'm obeying and doing what I'm supposed to do—I'm a good little boy or girl—I obey and do what's right so everything is going to go smoothly for me. Then they get slapped with a trial later and realize, it doesn't work quite like that. Turn to 1 Peter 4 and we'll see the Bible tells us quite the opposite. God is definitely very loving and cares for us and wants to deliver us through whatever we have to go through, but He also specifically tells us that a normal expectation for a Christian is, it's going to hurt. It's going to be hard; it's going to be struggle and you are required to face absolute oppression and persecution from Satan and it's going to hurt and you're going to struggle through it. He tells us not to think it's unusual because it's just how it works—it's how Christianity works.

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, this is not an "if", this is a "when". This is going to hurt; it is going to happen to you and you're going to have to struggle your way through it. That's just simply how it works. If we go into this with this naive idea of, God is all about love and being kind and gentle and everything is going to feel good and as long as I obey everything will be wonderful. you're going to get disillusioned when some brutal trial hits you and you have to struggle through it. Continue in verse 13.

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 ... (NKJV)

We don't typically think of being reproached and persecuted as a blessing, do we? No, make that go away; that's why the Bible looks at it differently because it's about the long-term outcome.

14 continued) ... 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)

He's saying:

"Don't bring your suffering upon yourself because you were stupid and refused to obey God and insisted on making bad decisions."

That's not the suffering you want to face, you want to avoid that. But even if you do that, you're still going to have hard trials and you're still going to have a beating.

Continuing in verse 16) ...

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)

He's directly telling us that if you sign up to be a Christian, it's going to hurt. This is going to be painful; you're going to have to endure through this. There's going to be times where you are facing very painful trials and thinking, I didn't know it was going to be this hard and begging God to deliver you through it and to give you the strength to get through it. That's how Christianity works. In my lifetime in the church of God, I've seen a number of people get disillusioned with God when some very brutal trial hits them. They are disillusioned with God and think a loving God couldn't do this. This hurt too much and I can't have anything to do with a God who would do this. They are looking at love from that definition of, *does it feel good*, and that is not how God defines it. It's *does it do good, not does it feel good*. We have to think what is the ultimate outcome? He promises us all that if we are going to follow Christ, accept Him as our Savior and pursue salvation, we are going to be persecuted. It's not an "if", it's a "when". Turn to 2 Timothy 3:12.

2 Timothy 3:12 *Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. (NKJV)*

There isn't an asterisk next to this saying, *just the apostles*, *just the prophets in the Old Testament*, *just a few people*—all the rest of you, as long as you are good boys and girls, you get to skip it. That's not what it says. It says everybody is going to face it, it's part of how the program works. To properly understand the love of God and how He works with us—past, present, or future—we have to understand that biblical definition of love. It's not about *does it feel good*, is it pleasant and joyful for us while we are experiencing it, it's all about the long-term outcome. This is inherent to the very definition of love. What is the chapter in the Bible that we all think of when we think of defining love? Don't we always think of what is referred to as the love chapter—1 Corinthians 13? Let's turn there and read a few scriptures and I want you to notice how enduring through suffering like this is inherent to the very definition of love.

1 Corinthians 13:1 *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.*

2) And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

3) And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. (NKJV)

Notice the next several verses.

4) Love suffers long and is kind; (NKJV)

I've asked this question for years: How do we develop the ability to suffer long and be kind if we don't have to suffer long? Wouldn't that be a requirement of how we would develop that ability? It's inherently telling us that suffering is a part of this and learning how to endure through it is part of developing the very character of God.

*4 continued) ... love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;
5) does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;
6) does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;
7) bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
(NKJV)*

Let me read to you the definition of the Greek word translated into English as *endures*—when it says endures all things. It's transliterated into English as *hupomeno*, Strong's #5278 and the definition I'm going to give you is from The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament by Spiros Zodhiates. He defines it as,

“To remain under, that is, to persevere; endure, sustain, bear up under, suffer; as a load of miseries, adversities, persecutions, provocations, with faith”.

In other words, the very definition of Godly love is,

We're going to suffer through it with a good attitude and have the character of God even when we're going through it.

It's not this idea that, God just wants everything to be comfortable, loving, warm, and fuzzy because that's what people need. That's now how He defines it. His whole focus is not on *how it feels* for us today, but the ultimate outcome.

I mentioned in several sermons recently, if you look at the book of Job—one of the most thorough coverings in the Bible on the subject of suffering—it tells us from the very beginning of the story, God Himself repeatedly describes Job as a blameless and upright man who fears God and shuns evil. Makes it painfully obvious that He is not putting this guy through this—this isn't his just dessert for being this derelict and evil sinner—he's saying He literally goes to Satan and says, this is my poster child. Have you noticed my servant Job and what a great guy He is? Then He turns around and has Satan go after him. He then lets loose the most evil being in all of the universe to go after Job. He says you can do anything to my hero but just don't kill him. I mentioned how brutal this is, but why does He do this? Because of the end He has in mind. It's not because this is a pleasant experience for anybody. If you read through the book of Job, he is not enjoying this experience. He thinks this is the most awful nightmare he's ever experienced in his life. If we read through it, we agree we wouldn't want to sign up for that, it sounds like an awful nightmare. Why does He do it? He's focused on the end. Turn to James 5:10.

James 5:10 *My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience.*

11) Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful. (NKJV)

It was all about how the movie ended. It was all about testing Job and developing his character, his loyalty. Even as righteous a guy that Job was, what does he say at the end?

"I've heard you with the hearing of my ears, but now I get it. I have a deeper understanding of You and Your way and Your justice than I did before."

God gave him a fantastic rating to start with. He starts off saying,

"Now I understand things that I never would have understood if you had not put me through this ugly experience."

He gained so much more but also, it's much more than just what Job himself learned. Job said,

"I wish my words were written in stone and persevered forever."

They were—they were preserved in the Bible and millions of people have read them since then. Think again of the total positive outcome that came out of this—that's what God was focused on. All the good that He could accomplish. It wasn't focusing on a feel-good experience up front. There was nothing feel good about this experience. It was brutal, it was ugly and a nightmare no one would want to live through. In their wildest dreams, they would never want to have to go through that—I certainly wouldn't. You look at this and say, *God's definition of love is very different from ours*. We look at this through these carnal, physical human eyes and think love is what makes people feel good up front.

We've looked at historical examples—Ancient Israel and how God worked with them, we've looked at how God works with us today—He's consistent. He's *the same yesterday, today, and forever*. He's going to work with the rest of mankind the exact same way. I have found that, as I explained at the Feast, I started realizing about 13 years ago that something was wrong. What I meant by that, was from childhood I was taught a scenario where the majority of mankind has a comfortable, easy slide into the Kingdom of God, they don't have to face much tribulation, they don't have to endure to the end, they don't have to overcome the persecution that we just read in 2 Timothy that everybody who follows Christ is going to have. Somehow, they are going to skip all of that. When I would point out to people, this idea—I understand the appeal to it because it sounded great to me too—but when I start looking at the New Testament, this doesn't match anything the New Testament says. What I found was, the counter argument is God is love; He wouldn't put those people through suffering. He wants everything to be warm and fuzzy and positive. That's not what He did with Ancient Israel, that's not what He is doing with us today—none of this is inconsistent. I would always just get these emotional arguments that would come back.

I read this quote at the Feast in my sermon I gave last Sabbath—I'm filming this a week or two ahead of when you guys are going to see this, I'm actually filming it a week after the Feast—it's from Dr. Thomas Sowell. He says:

The reason so many people misunderstand so many issues is not that these issues are so complex, but that people do not want a factual or analytical explanation that leaves them emotionally unsatisfied."

What I have found over the years is, that's the road block for people who admit, God conquered the Promised Land and did these brutal acts because of the outcome—it would end well. They agree that God puts us through harsh trials today because He is focused on the long-term outcome and I would say, "Well He's going to do that with everyone else." Oh no, that wouldn't be loving. Is it not loving when He does that with us today then? We have to be consistent. If we understand the biblical definition of love, then it's not hard at all to understand how God works with us in the future.

As I explained in one of my sermons at the Feast this year, if we look at the millennium, it's this wonderful picture. There's no war, as Isaiah 2 tells us—*swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks—they don't learn war anymore*, everything is peaceable.

We have in Isaiah 35 all the health problems are healed, everybody is healthy, we have abundant resources *with the plowmen overcoming the reaper* and it's this wonderful utopia. That's definitely a part of God's plan and He tells us that in graphic detail but in our minds, that's what love is. It's making everything wonderful. Would God then turn around and turn Satan loose again and mess that up? Yes, that's what the Bible tells us. The reason why is not hard to understand—it's the same reason He puts us through those trials, for the exact same purposes.

Understanding love is key to understanding how God works historically with us today and in the future.

Turn to Revelation 20 and briefly look at the future. I covered this at the Feast. Describing the binding of Satan.

Revelation 20:1 *Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.
2) He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;
3) and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished.* (NKJV)

In my history in the church of God—which I've mentioned many times has been my entire life—we love to focus on that. Look at all the problems that are going to be made to go away. We get the bad guy and all his posse and lock them up where they can't affect mankind, that's going to make things so much better—and it will. We love to focus on that but we have trouble with the next sentence.

3 continued) ... But after these things he must be released for a little while. (NKJV)

Why would God set the bad guy back out to mess everything up? For the same reason He allows Satan to affect us today—not because *it feels good but because it does good*. We have to overcome those temptations and endure through those trials to build that character of God—that agape love in us—so we can be in His Kingdom. It's the process of how Godly character is developed. Look at verse 7, this is where the story picks up after the millennium.

*7) Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison
8) and will go out to deceive the nations 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 going to stir up a war. This is the exact opposite of Isaiah 2. They don't learn war anymore, obviously that applies to the millennium. As one person asked me towards the

end of the Feast, how do you reconcile these two scriptures? They both have to be true. Isaiah 2 is true and this is true as well. Isaiah 2 is obviously specifically referring to the millennium. It's obvious there isn't ever war again in human existence because we have it described that we know there is. So obviously that applies to the millennium.

As I mentioned also at the Feast, if you put Matthew 25 together with this, what we see is all of these perfect things we see in the millennium, obviously go away in the 8th day period. Let's go to Matthew 25, we talked about this at the Feast but I'll cover it again for any that may not have heard that sermon. What we're going to see is the criteria that Christ uses when He's separating the sheep from the goats. If we just read the context and take it for what it says, the concepts obviously apply to the Firstfruits and we're obviously judged by the same criteria but what He is specifically describing is the judgment of the rest of mankind.

Matthew 25:31 *When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.*

32) All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. (NKJV)

Christ has returned, He is now on earth and He's judging all of mankind. This isn't the Firstfruits that He's specifically addressing. Obviously, the same concepts apply to the Firstfruits, don't get me wrong. Conceptually these same criteria apply to us. But what He is specifically talking about here, He's specifically talking about judging the rest of mankind.

33) And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

34) Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

35) for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in;

36) I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'

37) "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink?

38) When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You?

39) Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?'

40) And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

41) Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?'

42) for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink;

43) I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'

44) "Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?'

45) *Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'*

46) *And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."* (NKJV)

The point I want you to notice in all of this, is for any of these criteria to make any sense, obviously when Satan gets released—during the 8th day period as I covered at the Feast—what's going to happen is this. He is going to make that period of time, once He's had a chance to really work on mankind and start tempting them to rebel again, He's going to create an environment rather similar to our world today. Where there's wars, there's suffering, people doing without resources, sickness—all of this is going to take place. People scratch their head and say, that wouldn't be loving. Is it loving when God puts us all through that today to build His character in us? Of course, it is. It's not about *does it feel good?* Is it a pleasant thing to go through? It's what is God ultimately accomplishing with it. It's always about *does it do good.* It's about how the movie ends. I find people struggle with this subject because they are wearing what I like to refer to as an "emotional blindfold". If you're looking at the Bible and whether you're looking historically, us today, or in the future, if you are defining love from the question, "*Does it feel good?*", then your brain is automatically going to reject something that doesn't match that view. It becomes an "emotional blindfold" where someone can show you a stack of scriptures that all agree and say the same thing and you'll just want to reject it and say, "That's not love!" As one person put it—it was actually a long-term minister in the church of God and I quoted this at the Feast, talking about this very concept with him—he said "This is so negative, God's way is positive." In other words, God's way feels good, it's based on the question, *Does it feel good?* No, it's not, God's way is based on the question, "*Does it do good?*" That's how God defines love.

If we are going to understand God's very nature, how He worked with mankind in the past, how He works with us today and how He'll work with mankind in the future, we have to understand His mind and character. That is summed up by the term *agape love* as 1 Corinthians tells us, as 1 John 4 tells us—*agape love* defines God's character. As we go forward from this day, let's understand that when we look at the subject of "love", it's not about whether it feels good to our emotions, whether it feels good on the front end. It's about what it ultimately accomplishes. It's about how the movie ends. So, when you decide whether something is loving from a biblical perspective, don't ask the question, "Does it feel good to my emotions?" ask the question, "Does it do good in the long run?"