

When Mankind Meets Its Maker

4—Love—God’s Nature and Project

Who can understand God loving the world?

- ▣ The cross as a symbol of sacrificial love is part of our culture, but has lost its power.
- ▣ Love is assumed to be something we have, so it is difficult to talk about.
- ▣ Blindness to our actual condition hides our need of an offering for sin (John 3:15-16).

We need to know these things.

- ▣ God loves us. He doesn’t posture, or experiment.
- ▣ He knows what is needed and sees that it’s done.

Christ and the apostles link God’s love with the death of Christ in a number of ways.

First, the cross shows that love is God’s project before it is ours.

- ▣ Jesus comes with a purpose, and before he dies, he announces, ‘It is finished’.
- ▣ He comes so we may have a full life (John 10:10). This must mean he will cause us to love because it is where we love that we actually live.
- ▣ Love is a ‘God thing’ (1 John 4:7-8). It begins with him. But it also *is* him. He doesn’t need our loveliness, or even our need, to attract him. He just loves.
- ▣ Imagining that love is our nature and project is causing us to unravel—personally and socially.
- ▣ Our insights shrink until we only see what pleases us. And our horizons shrink until they only include the people we agree with.
- ▣ What God does through the cross is a power that creates love. Jesus’ death constrains us to love—that is, it encloses us on both sides and moves us from behind into all that life now can be (2 Cor. 5:14).

Second, the cross shows love is God’s priority.

- ▣ It’s easy to give first place to accomplishment or to accumulating securities.
- ▣ Love is prominent in Jesus’ teaching before he dies. His life is on the line for love.
- ▣ He will love his people ‘to the end’ (John 13:1. All references are to John’s Gospel).
- ▣ He wants us to love one another like he does (13:34).
- ▣ He wants us to love him (14:24).
- ▣ He will go to the cross so the world will know he loves his Father God (14:31). This is his first love. He knows the Father’s love for him and that’s how he loves his disciples.
- ▣ This is where he wants us to live as well—in his love—by obedience (15:9).
- ▣ We love Christ by obeying him (15:10).
- ▣ We are to love one another—laying down our lives if necessary (15:12-13, 17).
- ▣ He prays that the love he receives from the Father will also be *in* his disciples (17:22, 26).
- ▣ And he knows none of this will ever happen unless he dies.
- ▣ Jesus has already told us that the greatest call on our humanity is to love God and to love one another (Mark 12:28-31). Now, he will do just that.

- ❑ If we're not interested in love, we can let Jesus pass without a thought. But if love is the way to live, and what we want, we need to know what happens when Jesus dies.

Third, the cross shows that love is not deserved.

- ❑ Jesus is the 'friend of sinners' (Luke 7:34). 'Righteous' people don't need his help (Mark 2:16-17).
- ❑ Paul helps us think about this (Romans 5:6-10).
 - We are weak. That's about as low as you can get—someone without the power to be properly human.
 - We are ungodly—we coast around as though the world doesn't need a Creator, let alone a Saviour.
 - We are sinners—we just don't 'get it' and constantly miss what we are supposed to do.
- ❑ That's where we are when Jesus dies for us. We are not lovely people. God is saying, 'Look at me. What kind of God am I?' He 'commends' his love to us—asking us to think about whether his love is real or not.
- ❑ Jesus gets closer to us than we can get to ourselves. The thought of us being wrong, polluted, unlovely and arrogant doesn't fit easily into our thinking. Jesus sees all of that in us and still says, 'I want to be with you. I'll wear what you are. I'll suffer what you deserve.'
- ❑ Jesus says, 'I'll give you all that I am so you can be pure before my Father, and before your Father.'

Fourth, the cross destroys love's enemy—fear.

- ❑ What kills love is not busyness or difficult people. It's threat and shame.
- ❑ Jesus loves us and is sent to be a propitiation (1 John 4:10). He needs to turn the wrath of God away from us, and does so by bearing it himself.
- ❑ We've noted that there's something built into us that wants to make love our project. But love is 'of God'. He is where it comes from and why it works (1 John 4:7-12).
- ❑ Because Jesus so comprehensively endures God's wrath, there is no fear of it touching us. We no longer need to fear meeting God (1 John 4:17-18). Love and fear don't belong together. But, if fear is gone, love can thrive!
- ❑ John explains this by saying, 'as Jesus *is*, so are we in this world.' In other words, Jesus is in heaven. We are on the earth. But we are *as* he is.
- ❑ The sequence of this is important.
 - There is a time when Jesus is in torment—on his cross. He could not say 'Father' as he usually did. He said, 'My God. Why have you forsaken me?' (Matthew 27:46).
 - Then, he announces that his work is finished (John 19:30), and entrusts his spirit to the Father (Luke 23:46).
 - God raises him from the dead. And to his side to administer the kingdom. His torment is over.
 - This is how he is now. And we—in this world—are as he is.
- ❑ Our torment is over. Love has begun.
- ❑ 'God abides in us and we are *made* perfect in love'.
 - This is not about us being perfect in love, but about God's love being perfected or coming to its goal in us.
 - He is confident that his work will bear fruit and cause us to love.

Fifth, the cross creates something entirely new.

- ▣ To see the cross as God's revelation and gift of love is to be a new person. Love is not strange to us now.
- ▣ One man dies for all. So, that is the end of all we *have* been. What happens from now on is all new—made by God (2 Corinthians 5:14-17).
- ▣ Life comes to us, and sometimes, at us, with many difficulties. But the cross is our assurance that nothing that ever happens around, or to us, will separate us from God's love (Romans 8:38-39).