

An old game pulls flower petals while saying, “he loves me” for one petal pulled, and “he loves me not” for the next, with the last petal supposedly revealing whether the object of your desire loves you or not. Does *God* love you? Some never worry whether God loves them because they think He loves everyone alike. Not true! Scripture teaches that God sets His love, His special love, on particular individuals to save them, and lets others perish. His love is a distinguishing love—it sets apart certain ones for salvation.

Granting this for now, how can we know for sure if God loves anyone, and if He loves us in particular? Malachi 1.1-5 answers:

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The LORD tells and shows His people that He loves us in particular.

I. GOD TELLS US THAT HE LOVES US (1, 2a). He says to us, “I love you.”

We cannot know this by intuition, feelings, or circumstances. We only know this special love of God for us by His own spoken word. People without Scripture cannot know that God has any special love for them.

- A. The Prophetic Word (1). “Burden,” oracle: a weighty message and grave responsibility for the prophet. “The word of the LORD,” from *the God* of Malachi (2 Pet 1.21), not Malachi. Addressed “to Israel” in particular, i.e., God’s chosen people (Amos 3.1, 2 “highlights God’s special choice of Jacob’s descendants,” ESVEC). Yet “Israel” is not all/only Jacob’s physical descendants (Rom 9.6; Gal 3.7-9).
- B. The Pronounced Love (2a). Had told Israel this ages ago (Deut 7.6-8), but here it is so warm, personal, direct: “I have loved you.” Banish the lie the OT God is unloving! Past tense here, “have loved,” alludes to proof of God’s love in redemptive history.
- C. The Persistent Love. Those whom the immutable God ever loved He always loves (Mal 3.6). The whole book of Malachi exposes much grievous sin in Israel but God’s love is irrevocable (Rom 11.29).

II. GOD SHOWS US THAT HE LOVES US (2b-5; cf. 1 Jn 3.18). God’s love is so much more than talk; He shows His love by rich gifts, saving deeds.

- A. We Doubt Him (2b). “Wherein hast thou [how have you, ESV] loved us?” Despite God’s own Word, we are prone to doubting Him. And this unbelief bears the poisonous fruit of sin (irreverence, 1.6; unacceptable worship, 1.7, 8, 13; refusing to hear Him, 2.2, etc.). *Certainty that God really loves us is foundational to true religion!*
- B. He Chose Us (2cd). Now God answers the challenge of 2b, proves His point: God loved Jacob, hated Esau. Only God’s gracious love accounts for His choosing Jacob. Both the same in themselves: twin brothers (but Esau born first, not Jacob) of the same parents, same depravity, guilt. God revealed to Isaac and Rebekah His choice of Jacob over Esau even before their births (Rom 9.10-13).

C. He Saves Us by Condemning a Substitute (3, 4).

- In the past (3): God’s love for Israel is striking by contrast with His hatred of Edom (Esau’s descendants). “The point is not that God loved Jacob *more than* Esau but that he loved him *rather than* Esau” (NAC). “I have devastated Esau’s hill country and abandoned the land to jackals [wild animals resembling a wolf and a fox]” (alt.). “In fulfillment of prophecy the nation of Edom had been conquered and its people driven out” (NAC).
 - In the future (4): Edom refuses to acknowledge God’s wrath against them but hopes for future blessing based on self-reliance. God announces He will frustrate their plans and pour out His wrath. The reprobate, not chosen for salvation, have no possible escape from hell. This proves God’s love for Israel because He saves them *through the destruction of Edom!* God judges others for Israel’s salvation, even using substitutionary language (Isa 43:3, 4).
 - The spiritual type in the national Israel/Edom experiences is fulfilled in the spiritual Israel/Christ relationship. From love to God’s elect, He gave up His Son Jesus Christ our Lord to die on the cross, to bear and suffer for our sins (Isa 53.6), as if He had committed them all Himself (John 3.16; 1 John 3.16; 4.10; Rom 5.8). The greatest proof that God is for us in love is that He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all (Rom 8.31, 32)!
- D. His Love Acknowledged (5). This also (like verse 4) is a prophecy of the future. God’s love will become so powerfully evident (“your eyes shall see”) that we cannot doubt any longer, but must admit it (“ye shall say”). “Great is the LORD beyond the border of Israel” (alt.). Elsewhere, “the idea of the LORD’s greatness is applied to the universal reign of the Messiah, and in some of the psalms it is connected with the eschatological salvation (NICOT).

1) We who believe in Christ have in many biblical passages like this God’s plain assertion that He loves us with a special, distinguishing love that secures our salvation from all our sins and miseries. 2) We have the proof of that love in history, because He gave up His beloved Son on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for our salvation. 3) We have the future experience of seeing Christ come in power and glory with gracious love, granting us the kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world (Matt 25.34).

You don’t need to doubt God’s love to you if you are believing in Christ. Know for sure that God loves you in particular and that Christ is yours through faith in Him. You could and would never have believed in Christ apart from the Father’s electing love for you, the Son’s atoning death for you, and the Spirit’s effective call of you. This is proof that God loves you in particular. The truth of this matter is stated clearly in 2LCF 18.1, 2.

Appeal: Do you truly believe in the Lord Jesus and love Him in sincerity? Are you trying to walk in all good conscience before Him? Thus you may know God’s special love for you and rejoice in the hope of glory. Amen. Ω