

Scriptures and Doctrine :: God is love all the time for His people. HE is for us.

God is love all the time for His people. HE is for us. - posted by CofG (), on: 2020/9/19 17:49

Of the few things I recall from my short season attending the church, the message covering the wall remains the strongest: "Prepare to meet your God."

It was the big "E" on the eye chart; to not notice it confirmed blindness. Even when one did not wish to see it, the command stared at you.

With every distraction from the sermon it spoke "Prepare to meet your God. When attention began to drift in prayer, it found me "Prepare to meet your God. I prayed harder, sang louder, and listened better because of that inescapable command ever surveying as a watchman from his tower.

Agonizing Invitations

I also remember the day I gathered the nerve to look up the ominous words. Amos 4:12, the wall told me. I began in verse 6, where the Lord spoke these words to his people:

"I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and lack of bread in all your places, yet you did not return to me," declares the Lord.

"I also withheld the rain from you when there were yet three months to the harvest . . . yet you did not return to me," declares the Lord.

"I struck you with blight and mildew; your many gardens and your vineyards, your fig trees and your olive trees the locust devoured; yet you did not return to me," declares the Lord.

"I sent among you a pestilence after the manner of Egypt; I killed your young men with the sword, and carried away your horses, and I made the stench of your camp go up into your nostrils; yet you did not return to me," declares the Lord.

"I overthrew some of you, as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were as a brand plucked out of the burning; yet you did not return to me," declares the Lord.

"Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" (Amos 4:6-12)

Prepare to meet your God. This was not a call to worship for a Sunday service. It was a terrifying summons for an adultorous people to brace themselves to meet their jealous Husband in judgment. Yet this alone did not trouble me. All that God did before the severe warning also shook me.

"God will not leave us to perish. When we wander toward cliffs, he corrals us with his rod back toward heaven." TweetShare on Facebook
Did you catch them?

God desired for Israel to return to him, so what did he do? He gave them cleanness of teeth (meaning he starved them); he withheld rain from them, tanking their food supply and economy; he destroyed their vineyards; he spread diseases among them; he killed young soldiers, repossessed their warhorses, and decimated their forces; he ordained for flames to overtake cities. God afflicted them in order that they should turn and seek him.

They refused. And since none of these trials brought the people to him, he would go to the people. "Prepare to meet your God."

Fiercer Than We Expect

Is this picture incompatible with the God you worship? The God who, out of love for you, will harm you in order to save you? A love that will cut, break, and cause you to bleed "like an expert surgeon" in order to heal you? How many pe

ws, I wondered, would have emptied if the verse crawled from the wall into the pulpit?

Many are content with God's love consisting in only tender kindness and unbroken gentleness. They wish for his love to be wholly devoted to their immediate happiness – however they choose to seek it. Tenderness seems to be the unimpeachable disposition some imagine of God. Tender toward our dreams. Tender toward our desires. Tender toward our bank accounts and sins. This "god of love" takes no miracle of grace to adore; the atheist doesn't mind this God.

Yet God's love, as found in the Bible, is a fire that consumes dross, a chisel that molds into his own perfection, an eternal embrace that chokes out all rivals, a sharp scalpel intended to give real life and strong happiness far beyond the grave. This love has greater aims than our comfort, our health, or our safety – in this life. This love is fiercer and deeper than we often assume, better and stronger than we often want. This love can harm us, and this love can kill us.

He Scourges Those He Loves

God's love does not orbit around our felt needs. He has our best, not our easiest, in mind. His love – dangerous, jealous, possessive – is the love that will consistently wound us to save us.

Have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." (Hebrews 12:5-6)

"Chastises" here can be translated "scourges" or "whips." It is something to endure. Something unpleasant and rather painful. Something we wouldn't sign up for. Something we're tempted to despise. Something that doesn't feel tender, gentle, or loving in the moment. But his whippings are just that. Look at the text.

He strikes those he loves and harms every son whom he receives. He doesn't discipline Satan's children, only his own (Hebrews 12:8). These undesirable corrections, these marks of adoption, bring us to "share his holiness" and enjoy that "peaceful fruit of righteousness" leading to eternal life (Hebrews 12:10-11).

His love has sharp edges – not to destroy us, but to sever us from all that threatens to. Instead of what we often perceive to be the stormings of our angry God, proof of his disgust with us, these corrections are, in fact, the unlikely evidences of his love. As Calvin put it,

It is an inestimable consolation – that the punishments by which our sins are chastened are evidences, not of God's anger for our destruction, but rather of his paternal love, and are at the same time of assistance towards our salvation, for God is angry with us as his sons, whom he will not leave to perish.

He will not leave us to perish. When we wander toward cliffs, he corrals us with his rod back toward heaven. What feels to be the glory of the "god of love" – being left to our own way – is, in reality, his wrath, which bears the refrain: "God gave them up . . . gave them up . . . gave them up" (Romans 1:24, 26, 28).

Even Death Can Be Love?

That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. . . . But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:30, 32)

God's love does not sit by quietly, contentedly, while we wander off into destruction. It does not stand by and watch his bride play the whore. It finds us. Redeems us. Washes us. Transforms us. Disciplines us. And sometimes it kills us.

Such love came unrequested to some Corinthians. They began to eat the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. They did not examine themselves. They ate and drank judgment. How did God respond? "That is why," the apostle explains, "many of you are weak and ill, and some have died." Some were sick due to God's discipline. Some were weak. Others died. Funerals were held because of God's disciplining his church.

Why would we be disciplined, even unto death? "So that we may not be condemned along with the world." There is something worse even than death. God's love sometimes stops our breath to save our souls. This love, unlike our puddle-deep assumptions, is an ocean, raging and beautiful. If God loved us like we love us, we would be lost.

To Be Loved by God

Oh, the fearsome, wonderful love of God. This God is so serious about having his own that he will starve them now to feed them forever, kill them now to keep them forever. His enemies may call him a monster, but his saints sing, "Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you" (Psalm 63:3).

To be loved by God is to be made holy, to be dressed for heaven, fitted for eternity, brought through the howling wilderness of this world, across the raging river Jordan, and secured within the Promised Land of a new creation. This love will not spare us the bumps, bruises, and bleedings to ready us for his presence.

To ask that God's love should be content with us as we are is to ask that God should cease to be God: because he is what he is, his love must, in the nature of things, be impeded and repelled by certain stains in our present character, and because he already loves us he must labor to make us lovable. (C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 41)

"God's love does not orbit around our felt needs. He has our best, not our easiest, in mind." TweetShare on Facebook

And he does just that. Having forgiven us, he makes us beautiful. He bends all circumstance, works all things for good "every wound and every joy" for our everlasting glory of being conformed to this Son's image (Romans 8:28-29).

God's love embraces his children where they presently sit (he died for us while we were yet ungodly) "we do not make ourselves worthy of his love; we cannot. But his love, when it finds us, will not leave us where we are" we are destined to be holy and spotless before him in love.

With All His Heart and Soul

Yet this does not imply that he blesses and bruises equally, nor that he stands indifferent to our cries or our pain. Just the contrary. In the middle of a heart-wrenching lamentation over the Lord's chastisement of Israel, Jeremiah reminds us,

The Lord will not cast off forever, but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men. (Lamentations 3:31-33)

"He does not afflict from his heart." His delight is not to wound us. He is not like the boy at recess burning worms with a microscope. Even when he lays the heaviest afflictions upon us, it is not his joy to do so. Rather, Jeremiah records his heart toward the church this way:

I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul. (Jeremiah 32:40-41)

This love "the only love strong enough to spare us from hell, to make us pleasing in his sight, to delight us for eternity" does not leave us alone to our pet sins and damnable devices. His love puts fear in us that we may not turn from him. He wants us where he is, with all his heart and all his soul.

He proved the imponderable depths of his heart for his people once and for all when Jesus Christ came to bear the wrath of God for our sins. It should not surprise us that God would crush us for our sins; it should surprise us that his love would crush the Son for us. No matter how God chooses to afflict us for our good, the heaviest blows are never what our sins deserve. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son.

Greg Morse article.