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Why Does God Love Us?

Many of us find it very difficult to love other people.

But love is a command for the Christian. It is not an option; it is an order. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:34).

One of the reasons we have difficulty loving others is because we do not really know the depth of God's love for us.

So we are going to take a look at how God loves us. When we discover how He loves us, we will learn how to love others. We are to love with the same kind of love He has for us.

There are many passages of Scripture we could turn to in order to understand God's love for us, but I want to use one which has been very meaningful in my own life. It is Colossians 2:13-14.

"And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross."

Do you know when God started loving you?

"When you were dead."...What a time to start!

The most helpless and unattractive phase of a human being's life is a horrible stink. Moreover, we were not only

dead; we were dead in our transgressions. So this is not a picture of a dead person lying in a nice casket, draped in silk: this is a dead corpse in the mire, lying in all of the filth.

But even when we were so unattractive, God loved us.

He didn't love a nice looking person who carried a Bible under his arm and a cassette recorder in his hand. He loved a dead corpse in all of its filth.

I asked myself once, "Why does God love us?" A great many people have puzzled over that question. Now I believe I understand the reason. *It is because He made us, and we are His children.*

If you have children, are they perfect? Do they never disobey? Are they always clean and tidy? No, of course not.

So why do you love them?

You love them because they are your children. Sometimes they do some very wrong things, but you still love them. They dump their milk on the carpet, write on the walls, cry at night, misbehave when you have visitors.. .but you love them anyway.

There's no mystery about your love for them—you love them because you can't help loving them. So don't be surprised that God loves you. You belong to Him. And, in spite of everything, He loves you.

Once you realize that God loves you just as you are, you begin to relax.

To know that you are accepted and loved just as you are takes all the tension out of your relationship with Him.

This is how we are to love one another—just as we are. We should love one another not because the other person is good, right, or nice, but just because we are brothers.

God loves us because He made us and we are His. We should love one another just because we are people, not because of desirable qualities. If God took into account our behavior, our works, our ways or our doctrines, He would hate us! But He loves us because we are His creatures. And we are

all brothers and sisters in the same created family.

He also loves us because He gave us life.

If you had a son or daughter who died and you had the power to raise that son or daughter up, wouldn't you do it? Of course you would. Then don't wonder that God did it, because He had the power. When we were dead, He gave us life because we are His children.

Do you ever get upset with your kids? Most of us do.

God also gets upset with us. One time He got so upset with His children that He sent a flood that swept most of them away. He repented that He had made them.

I have seen that happen with some parents, after their children have been apprehended by the police because they were using drugs and stole in order to pay for their habit.

"I'm sorry I ever had children," I have heard them say. But later on, they see their children in another light. Then they no longer are sorry that they gave birth to them.

The same is true of God.

Another day, God sent a second flood. This flood solved His problem with His children once and for all.

The second flood was the blood that flowed from Jesus on the cross. God's plan was to put everybody on that cross in Christ. So much so that Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live" (Galatians 2:20). And again in II Corinthians 5:14, "One died for all, therefore all died."

Jesus did not die for Himself because He didn't need to die and be born all over again. He didn't need to be saved; He had no sins to pay for because He was born and lived without sin. He was born of a virgin so that Adam's sin did not affect Him. Therefore, He could be the spotless Lamb of God. If He had been a sinner Himself, He could not have paid for our sins. His death was for us, not for Himself.

The cross was a common mode of execution. The Romans killed tens of thousands on crosses. Many of them died inno-

cently, as martyrs. What made the difference with Jesus' death was that from the Father's point of view it was not really His Son dying there, it was you and I.

That's why He turned His back on His own Son: He had become identified with the entirety of the human race. He has become sin personified. He who was without sin was made sin for us.

Jesus voluntarily took our place, taking upon Himself our sinful state. In God's eyes He was guilty, though He Himself was innocent.

It is very important that we understand this. Because if you look at the cross and see Jesus hanging there with thorns pressed into His scalp and blood dripping from Him, and you say, "Poor Jesus!" you are looking only at a martyr.

But if you look at the cross and by faith see hanging there what God put on the cross, you see yourself. And when you see yourself on the cross, Jesus becomes your Savior.

You were the problem that God wanted to do away with!

And this time, no one was left out—not even Noah. From the first human being in the garden of Eden to the last person who is not yet born, all were put on that cross. You and I were not yet born when the cross happened, but we were there because it takes in the entire fallen race of mankind. This is the second flood, in which God finished with everybody.

When Jesus said, "It is finished," He meant that Juan Carlos Ortiz was finished. That was my problem—Juan Carlos Ortiz. But God finished with that problem by killing me on the cross.

He finished with your biggest problem too!

But not only were we in Christ when He died, we were in Christ when He rose. This is what our baptism pictures.

The problem is, many of us don't understand what baptism means. We sometimes try to create an emotional experience out of it because we believe that we have to feel something in

order to be born again. Even some preachers try to create the kind of atmosphere which stirs up our emotions to the point that we weep, thinking that this is evidence of our new birth.

But this is completely erroneous. In fact, I prefer a dry-eyed born again person to a wet-eyed one, because the one who doesn't get too emotional perhaps understands better what has happened to him.

Our baptism declares that when Jesus died, we believe that we too were crucified and buried with Him. He also experienced resurrection. In our case, we don't have to experience crucifixion, burial and resurrection: we just believe what already happened in Christ.

If God says it, we believe it; we don't have to look to feelings. When those who base their faith on feelings don't have those feelings, they may not have faith either. But when we base our faith on facts, the facts never change.

You don't say, "I feel today that Washington was the first president of the U.S."

The fact of his presidency has nothing whatever to do with your feelings.

Neither do you say, "I feel today is Tuesday." Whether you feel it or not, it is Tuesday.

To base our faith on feelings is to build on a shaky foundation of sand. To base our faith on the facts of what God tells us happened to us in Christ is to build on a solid foundation which will never move.

From God's viewpoint, we have been put on the cross—we are in Christ.

Paul puts this very simply when he describes, in Romans Chapter 5, two heads of two different races. Adam was the head of the physical human race; Christ, the Second Adam, was the head of a new race. Under Adam we all were made sinners, but under Christ we all are made righteous.

The whole human race was included under Adam. In the same way, all who believe in Him are included in Christ.

From the very first human being who walked the earth to

the last who will ever live, all were declared sinners because of Adam—and all are declared righteous because of Christ. When Jesus died, the Scriptures say that He descended into the depths of the earth and preached to those who died before the cross ever happened. That means the cross was effective for the whole human race.

For the sin of Adam, I am declared a sinner; for the righteousness of Jesus, I am declared righteous by faith.

The point I want to emphasize is that I became a sinner through no cause of my own, so also I become righteous through no cause of my own. This is something that God does.

"When we were dead, He gave us life." A dead man cannot help himself.

We should have no difficulty understanding that we were born sinners, because from the very beginning we started to disobey.

One of the earliest things I learned to say was, "No!" So did you. No child ever said, "Yes, Mommy; of course, you are right." We are born rebellious, born crooked.

But the Bible says, "Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (II Corinthians 5:17).

When we believe in Christ, we become part of a new humanity. What He accomplished in His death and resurrection becomes a reality to us simply through believing. The instant we believe, we start life all over again—the old person is dead and a new person has come into being.

Now let us see what our death means.

Paul goes on to say in the passage we are looking at from Colossians, "Having forgiven us all our transgressions." Having forgiven us how many? All!

Do you know what all means? The *all* of God is different from your all and my all.

If I tell someone, "Brother, I forgive you all that you did

against me," although I don't say it, it is understood that I forgive him all that I know about.

If tomorrow I discover some other terrible thing that he did, I'll challenge him again, "And what about this also?"

When God says all, He knows everything. His all is greater than our all. He knows every detail of every sin we have ever committed, far more than we ourselves know.

Also, it is evident that when I say, "I forgive you all," I mean all until the present moment. But from now on, beware! Whereas in the case of God, He knows the future. When He saved us, He knew the problem He was getting into. He knew everything about us from the beginning to the end of our lives.

God is an eternal Being. For an eternal Person there is no past or future: everything is in the present.

Because we are limited, we have past and future as well as the present. But God sees everything in the present. That is why He can take something that is going to happen a thousand years from now and show it to you in a vision or through prophecy.

God doesn't have to wait until the end of the year to balance His business as you and I do; He can do His book-keeping before the year begins. He knows everything in advance—in advance for you and me, but not for Him; because for Him there is no advance. He doesn't live in days and nights: a thousand years is like one day.

Einstein said that if we were to travel at the speed of light, we could live in the present continually. But God is the father of light, the creator of it, the One who said, "Let there be light." He lives in another dimension where time doesn't count.

God, of course, is the only one who lives in the present.

We don't know the present: we have only past and future. Perfect present doesn't exist for us. When I say, "I am in the present," as I say the word present it is already past. When I say "sent," "pre" is past. In order to have perfect present,

we would need to stop the time, and in the dimension we live in we cannot do that.

So the present is the prerogative of God.

For God there is no future. His name is, "I am." His very name speaks of the eternal present. Jesus also said, "Before Abraham was, I am."

Because we live in the dimension of time we would argue, "Lord, you don't know grammar. You should say, 'Before Abraham was, /was.' "

"No sir, I am."

"But before Abraham was is past, so you have to say, '7 was.'"

"What do you mean, 'Past'?"

You see, for God there is no time. Everything is perfect present. That is why Jesus also said, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." He didn't say, "I will be with you." He said, "I am." The Bible describes us as seated in the heavenlies.

"Lord, what a mistake. You mean we will be seated, in the future; because we are not yet seated."

"No, I mean you are seated, present tense."

We are also spoken of as predestined, called, and justified—all of which we can agree with. But then it says, "Glorified."

"Glorified? No, not yet."

"Yes, now. Glorified."

"How can You say that, Lord?"

God lives in the eternal realm of which we are not conscious in our natural state. But the eternal realm is more real than the "real" world around us.

When we die, we lose our present consciousness of time and space and enter into God's dimension. In this dimension, Jesus is the Lamb of God offered before the foundation of the world, because for Him there is no time other than the

perfect present.

Do you believe that Jesus took your sins away when He died on the cross? Of course you do. But since you were not yet born, how could He have done that? How could He pay for sins which you hadn't even committed?

Because He lives in the present, God knew all your sins before you committed them in the dimension of time and space. He knew them all. Do you think that you are going to commit a sin one of these days which is going to take God by surprise?

Can you imagine Him saying, "Oh my, I forgot to put that one on the cross!"

No, that can't happen; you can't take the eternal I Am by surprise.

If God has called you, relax. He knew whom He called. He knew everything about you from the beginning of your life to the end. And He forgave you all your transgressions.

One day I had a revelation of the meaning of this word *all* in my own life.

For many, many years I had very bad migraine headaches. Do you know what a migraine is like? Those who don't have them don't know. It's like those who are single who think they know how to rear children: even if they have learned about such things in school, they don't know. A migraine is terrible.

I used to have them two or three times every week. They started at about 5:30 in the morning with a little pain in my forehead, spreading to the area of my eye, with accompanying symptoms of nausea, an increased pulse and frequent fainting. There were times when I was driven to distraction; I couldn't stay locked in my room in darkness. So I would go out, and faint.

Three times I fainted in the pulpit and was taken to the hospital.

Needless to say, I went to the best doctors in Argentina,

North America and Europe. I had friends in the church who were doctors, and they did what they could for me. In the end they sent me to a psychiatrist. He prescribed valium. I took it for a time, until I decided that I shouldn't do so any longer. But the migraines kept coming, continually worse.

Not long after I wrote the book *Disciple*, I was at home studying this passage in Colossians 2 for my personal benefit.

I said, "Lord, does this mean that you have forgiven me even for the things I haven't done yet? Then that means that you accept me just as I am!"

God seemed to answer me by saying, "You are the preacher, and you don't know that? Stupid!"

Actually, I had preached it; I was professor of Romans in our seminary. But though I knew it in my head, it had not yet dropped down to my heart. I understood that I have peace with God not through my performance, but through Jesus; I hadn't yet seen that the only way to have peace with myself is also through Jesus and not through performance.

That day the Holy Spirit continued to talk to me. "Do you know what your problem is, Juan Carlos?" He asked me. "You haven't accepted yourself as you are."

"Wait a minute," I interjected. "How can I accept myself as I am knowing myself as I do? I can't possibly accept myself. Actually, I am very upset with how I am doing. My character is very poor. No, I can't accept myself!"

The Lord seemed to get a little upset with me.

'If the blood of Jesus My Son is good enough for Me, who are you for it not to be good enough for you?" He challenged. "Are you better than I?"

I began to see that acceptance has nothing to do with performance. No matter how bad I am, the blood of Jesus is sufficient. And if God had forgiven me and accepted me such as I was, then I had better accept myself.

"You know, Juan Carlos," the Lord continued, "I know you better than you know yourself. Actually, you are worse

than you think. But I have accepted you—not because of your performance, but because of the blood of Jesus. Although I know all your wrongs, I have forgiven them all, right up until the day you die. Unless you forgive yourself all your wrongs—not just some of them, but all—and unless you promise yourself that you are always going to forgive yourself, you will never have peace with yourself."

Do you know where inner peace comes from? It comes from accepting yourself.

Do you know why we have problems with the people around us? All of the problems we have with people around us are a reflection of the problems we have within ourselves. And the problems we have within ourselves are a reflection of our lack of faith that our problem with God is completely and forever solved.

How rightly the hymn says, "My faith is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness; all other ground is sinking sand." I don't look any more to my performance, I look to what God looks at—the blood of Jesus.

That day I said to myself, "Johnny Ortiz, forgive me. I was so rough with you. I struck blows at you. I even hated you sometimes. I was like a masochist. I was forever trying to condemn you. No wonder you wept and experienced depression and insomnia. But now I am sorry. Juan Carlos, I forgive you everything past, present, and even in the future. You are fully forgiven."

So I hugged Juan Carlos, and we went to bed together and fell asleep very quickly.

Three weeks later I said, "Where are my migraines?"

Several years have gone by now, and I have not had one migraine!

When I made peace with myself, they ceased completely.

Do you know why we sometimes don't receive healing? Because we don't deal with the cause, which is our lack of peace.

I had gone to doctors, but also to many faith healers. Every one of them I came in contact with, I asked for prayer. There were some big names among them. But nothing happened.

Suppose you have a nail in your shoe which is hurting your foot. You limp around in great pain, begging everyone, "Brother, please pray for my foot!"

And although one after the other prays, nothing happens. What is the answer? You have to take the nail out. Isn't that simple?

No wonder the Bible says that "the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed." The word well-being is translated "peace" in the King James Version. Our health is directly affected by our inner sense of peace. Jesus takes the nail out of the shoe!

No amount of prayer or visits to doctors could heal me. My problem was my lack of acceptance of myself. So the very day I accepted myself, my migraines were finished. I forgave myself all my trespasses, just as God had forgiven me.

And when I found peace, I found health also.