

Unit 2



The Love of God

For All People and for His People

TRUTH

by memory – Romans 5:6-8 (ESV)

“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For one will scarcely die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die-- ⁸but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

in Bible –

Last week you learned that God is the ultimate standard of what is right, just and good. He is morally perfect. All His works demonstrate that He is completely righteous and His judgment is always irreproachably just. Knowing this should encourage your reliance on the gospel since without it, you would be without hope that you could stand before His righteous judgment.

This week you will explore an aspect of God’s goodness that gives you ground for such hope – the love of God – and you will find that God expresses His love in two very different ways. You may find it beneficial to focus on these passages during your personal worship this week. If you use a different Bible reading plan for your personal worship, be sure not to neglect the “S” of **PRAISE** – to summarize specific applications of the Bible passages for your life.

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Deuteronomy 7:6-9 – This text is part of a long speech Moses gave to the new generation of Israelites before they entered the Promised Land. In these verses, Moses reminds the people why God chose them and delivered them from Egypt.

What does it mean that God chose Israel to be His *“treasured possession?”* (7:6). Aren't all people God's people? Did God love Israel more, or differently, than the other peoples of the world?

Was Israel more worthy of God's special love than other nations? Explain your answer. (7:7)

Why did God choose Israel? Give two reasons. (7:8)

What does this passage teach you about the nature of God's love?

Jeremiah 31:1-7 – In this passage, the prophet Jeremiah is foretelling a time of blessing and redemption for Israel that would come after a period of punishment because of their unfaithfulness to God. Jeremiah offers Israel hope by reminding them of God's past dealings with them.

What event is Jeremiah recalling from Israel's past in verse 3? Why is it such an important demonstration of God's love for Israel?

Why does Jeremiah call Israel the *“foremost of the nations”* in verse 7? [Hint: Compare this with Deuteronomy 7:6. Note: “Jacob” is a frequent Old Testament synonym for the nation of Israel.]

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How does this passage add to the understanding of God's love given in Deuteronomy 7:6-9?

Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 6:32-36 – These parallel passages describe the love of God toward all people whether Jew or Gentile, Christian or non-Christian, and righteous or unrighteous.

How is the love of God described in these passages different from that described in the Old Testament study passages?

Romans 5:5-8 – Here Paul describes the quality of God's love by appealing to the greatest, most tangible, and most costly demonstration of that love.

How does the death of Christ demonstrate God's love?

How is this demonstration similar to the love God demonstrated to Israel in the Exodus?

How does this demonstration go beyond the love demonstrated in the Exodus?

Ephesians 2:1-7 – This passage helps us understand God's love for His people by connecting God's love with His grace. Take careful note of the use of pronouns – "you", "we", and "us".

How does Paul describe the default spiritual condition of all people? How does he describe their relationship to God? (verses 1-3)

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According to Paul, believers also shared this spiritual condition. But God took action to change believer's spiritual condition and their relationship to Him. Why? (verses 4-7)

The love of God for *all* people described in the study passages from Matthew and Luke seems very different from the love of God for *His* people described in Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, Romans, and Ephesians. How would you describe the difference you observe in these passages?

to summarize –

Would you argue with someone who told you that God loves people? Probably not. It's generally not questioned that God loves His creation, especially human beings, whom He created in His own image. What if someone told you that God loves *you*? Depending on your upbringing, this may be a difficult thought for you, but most people who believe in a personal Supreme Being (whether the God of the Bible, or otherwise) assume that this Being loves them and takes a personal interest in their lives. Now, what if someone asked you to *describe* God's love? Could you say what it is like? What would you compare it to? Is it merely bigger, better, and stronger than human love? Or is it something very different, a category of love that is unlike any of your usual definitions?

The trouble with the usual definitions is that culture and life experiences invariably distort your understanding of God's love, and your perception of His love for you. The goal of this unit is to help clear away the cultural fog so that you understand the love of God more clearly, and realize God's personal love for you more deeply.

In our culture, love can connote many kinds of attachments, experiences, and actions including romance, passion, selflessness, sacrifice, kindness, companionship, lust, and fondness. Yet, the dominant, core understanding of love in our culture is that it is *emotional and responsive, and thus conditional and changeable*. This is exactly what God's love is *not*.

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God's love is not primarily emotional, though it is not passionless, nor without intensity of feeling. It is primarily an action born of a commitment to bless the object of His love. Love is something God does, not just has. In Deuteronomy 7:7 you read that God *"set His love"* on Israel. The word is a verb, an action word indicating that God *joined Himself* to Israel. He entered into a covenant relationship with them for their benefit. His love for Israel flowed from His commitment to their well-being and was manifest by His actions: provision, guidance, nurture, protection, and giving Himself in personal communion with Israel. So, His love for Israel was a demonstration of His goodness, justice, and mercy toward them.

The reason God set His love on Israel is stated in 7:8, *"...because the LORD loves you."* This sounds strange and unsatisfying to our ears. When one of us asks our beloved, "Why do you love me?" we want to hear them list the aspects of our character or appearance that they find attractive or admirable. Our romantic sensibilities long to hear how our beloved responds emotionally to us. But, if Israel were to ask God, "Why do you love me?" they would hear, "Because I do; because I chose to bring goodness to you." So, His love was not a response to something lovely or admirable in Israel. In fact, the passage makes it clear that Israel had less to recommend them to God than the other nations of the earth. Still, God set His love on Israel, making them *"the foremost of nations"* (Jeremiah 31:7), simply because He did.

This means that His love is neither conditional, nor changeable. God's love is constant and faithful. It creates loveliness rather than looks for it. It flows from the fullness of God's character. It is not an empty pining for what He does not have. It does not vary in its commitment or intensity. Nor is it divorced from moral truth. It embraces His people as they are, but does not leave them as they are. His love is a holy love.

Now the question may have occurred to you, "Does God love all people the same?" Certainly God loves all people and shows His kindness to them. Jesus made this point beyond question when He taught that God, *"...sends rain on the just and on the unjust."* (Matthew 5:45). This may explain why people typically have an innate sense of, and hope for, God's love. But the study passage in Deuteronomy 7 also reveals that God placed His love especially on Israel in a way that no other nation at that time enjoyed. The fact is, that although all people are equally undeserving of God's love, the Bible is a history of God setting His love on individuals (Noah, Abraham, David), and groups (Israel and the Church) in a special way that others do not enjoy. This then, raises the question of the difference between the love God demonstrates for all people, and the love He bestows on the few He calls *His people*. Traditionally, this distinction has been described by the terms *Common Grace* and *Special Grace* (also called *Saving Grace*).

Common grace refers to the goodness and love God shows to all people universally, regardless of their spiritual condition. This is the love described by Jesus in Matthew 5 and Luke 6. Common grace is the demonstration of God's kindness which results in the blessing and prosperity of the whole human race. All of humanity thrives, grows, and enjoys the pleasures of earthly life because of common grace. It is distributed as God wills so that the pleasures of life are enjoyed to a greater or lesser degree by different people. *This means that ungodly people may actually enjoy more of the pleasures of life than the godly. Unfortunately, the ungodly often mistake these temporal blessings for the eternal favor of God. But, common grace does not erase the effects of The Fall. The power of sin is not broken and individual sins are not forgiven, though the full destructive power of sin is restrained.

Special grace refers to the goodness and love God shows only to a specific few with whom He enters into covenant relationship. This is the great love, rich mercy, and saving grace described by Paul in Ephesians 2:4-7. Special grace is redemptive. It removes the sin of the objects of this love, makes them alive in Christ, and places them in right relationship with God so that He may demonstrate the *"...immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."* (2:7) Special grace is God's determination to bring about the eternal blessedness and holiness of His redeemed people. He commits himself, even at great personal cost, to their eternal well-being. He bestows the goodness of His mercy on them, grants them His fatherly care and nurture, and provides them an eternal home. Paul tells us that the human mind cannot even imagine the glory of what God has prepared for His people (See 1 Corinthians 2:9).

(The chart at the end of this section may help you understand the differences between these two demonstrations of God's love.)

Who enjoys all these unimaginable privileges? We do – Christ's followers – despite the fact that we are unremarkable, unworthy, and undeserving. God took the initiative to demonstrate this special love for us when we were still unlovely: *"...while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* (Romans 5:8) There is no greater demonstration of love than His self-sacrifice. And now we experience His love through the outpouring of His Holy Spirit. (Romans 5:5). It's as if God were a great fountain of love overflowing into the empty hearts of believers so that we experience real communion with God – an individual, personal connection with the Lover of our souls. Surely, Paul had this personal connection in mind when he wrote that Christ *"...loved **me** and gave himself for **me**."* (Galatians 2:20).

*For an illustration of this, you need only compare the lives of John the Baptist and his murderer, King Herod. According to Jesus, John was the greatest of men and he enjoyed great favor with God (See Matthew 11:11). Yet, he enjoyed very little of the pleasures of this world. King Herod on the other hand, was a man whose personal power allowed him to enjoy all the pleasures he could imagine. Common grace enabled him to have much of this world's enjoyments, but the special grace granted to John was of far greater, eternal worth.

But, maybe you struggle to believe this. You want to believe God loves you in this special, personal way, but you just can't. Perhaps you were raised with so much negativism or a performance orientation from your parents that you just can't quite trust that God's loves you just as you are.

If you are in Christ, be assured that He does love you more than you can imagine. And remember that His special love comes to you with no strings attached because of Christ. You cannot (and need not) earn more of it, nor can you forfeit the assurance of it. He loves you – as you are – in Christ, because of Christ, and through Christ. Your whole life, including the joys and the sorrows, are all an expression of God's tender love for you. He will grant you all the caring you need from a truly loving Father with comfort, guidance, correction, provision, nurture, protection and communion. You belong to Him. And nothing in this world or the next will change that.

Daily remember and meditate on God's love for you. A growing perception and experience of God's special love for you will motivate your devotion to Christ. It will propel your journey toward spiritual maturity. And it will empower you to introduce others to God's love. As you perceive how greatly you are loved, you will long to share it more and more.

online –

Remember to visit www.perimeter.org/discipleshipcurriculum for this week's downloadable audio, video, or print resources.

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God Demonstrates His Love Two Ways

Common Grace

Special Grace

Definition... God's commitment to demonstrate His goodness and justice to all people regardless of their spiritual condition.

God's commitment to demonstrate His goodness, justice, and mercy to an elect people by redeeming them from sin, and bringing them into covenant relationship with Himself.

Revealed by... Nature (Natural Revelation) – God's natural governance of His creation that allows humanity to thrive and fill the earth.

The Gospel (Special Revelation) – God's supernatural intervention in people's lives by His redemptive work in the Old and New Covenants, and especially in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Experienced as... The enjoyment of the temporal pleasures of life, including the fruit of our labors, the ability to build families, communities, and cultures, as well as intellectual investigation of His world and artistic expression.

The enjoyment of personal, eternal communion with God through Christ that springs from God's mercy and pardon for our sins, our adoption as His children, and His promise to bring us eternally home to Himself.

Proof... "...For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matthew 5:45b) See also, Romans 1:19-20.

"...God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) See also, Deuteronomy 7:7-8.

Effect on Sin... Infiltrates the fallen world, restraining the full effects of sin, but never contrary to justice nor removing sin's grip from the human heart.

Infiltrates the heart of believers, creating a new nature, breaking the power of sin, and counting Christ's life and death as satisfying the penalty for their sin, thus placing them in right standing with God.

Proof... "Though grace is shown to the wicked, they do not learn righteousness: even in a land of uprightness they go on doing evil and regard not the majesty of the LORD." (Isaiah 26:10)

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." (2 Corinthians 5:17)

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EQUIPPING

Memorize the twelve Historical books of the Old Testament using the “Learning the Books of the Old Testament” equipping exercise at the end of the previous unit. You can also use this memory aid:

“Joshua (**Joshua**) judged (**Judges**) Ruth (**Ruth**) before two Samuels (**1 & 2 Samuel**) who were two Kings (**1 & 2 Kings**) of two cronies (**1 & 2 Chronicles**). The outcome was easy (**Ezra**). She had to bow knee high (**Nehemiah**) to Esther (**Esther**).”

Remember your goal: within the next several weeks you should be able to recite all 39 books of the Old Testament and all 27 books of the New Testament by memory in your group meeting.

The descriptions of God’s love you studied this week may conflict with your understanding of what love is. If so, describe your struggle to accept God’s love as you saw it described in the study passages and this material.

Do you struggle with the idea that God loves some people differently than others? Explain.

Is it hard for you to accept that God loves you unconditionally? What about when you fail or sin? Journal about the struggles you experience.

MISSION

"I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ." (Philemon 1:6, NIV)

In the quest to become an ambassador for Christ, you have now spent months praying for people on your target list, looking for opportunities to meet their needs, developing your personal testimony, and learning the *Life Issues* booklets. You may also have been through the **X-Press Your Faith** Seminar, or will soon have an opportunity to do so. Your mission assignments for this week will apply the rubber of all that equipping to the road of commitment.

This week your Journey Group leader is going to challenge you to make two formal, verbal commitments. The first is to commit to attending the upcoming **X-Press Your Faith** Seminar if you have not already attended. The second is to verbally commit that you will pursue an opportunity to walk through the *Life Issues* booklets with someone on your target list before your Journey Group breaks for the summer. Your group leader may be able to meet with you and the person you want to reach for Christ. You and your leader can discuss the details of how this will work. You should expect that your leader will ask you to make these commitments at your next meeting.

As you read this, you probably have all sorts of mixed emotions, ranging from excitement to dread. Pray daily this week in preparation to make these bold commitments. In the space below, write a prayer that you can pray daily, telling God why you do and don't want to make these commitments.

Why you want to make these commitments

Why you don't want to make these commitments

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