

### **How to Love**

How can I love God? How can I love God with all my heart, mind, soul, and being? How can I love God at all? How can I begin to love God? On my own, I cannot love God. Cracking the whip of “You shall love” condemns me as a non-lover and hater. It does not turn me into a lover of God.

The answer is the Gospel. God turns me into a lover by loving me and telling me that He loves me. The Bible says, “*We love because He first loved us*” (1 John 4:19). God the Father loved me so much that He gave His only-begotten Son to be my Saviour. God the Son loved me so much that He came to suffer and to die for me, for my sins, in my place.

God loves you just as much. But each of us needs to say “me” and “my” in personal faith. Jesus loves me. Jesus died for my sins. God has forgiven me, for Jesus’ sake.

We do not make ourselves lovers any more than we make ourselves believers. God the Holy Spirit does both through the Gospel, the message of God’s love and grace in Christ. After convicting us of our sin by the Law, the Holy Spirit convinces us of forgiveness by the Gospel. The Word of the Gospel is His tool to assure and reassure us that God is no longer mad at us for our sins but is pleased with us because His Son took the guilt of our sins upon Himself and bore the punishment for our sins in our place on the cross.

The Holy Spirit makes us believers. He turns us to trust that God really has loved us so much that He went to the cross for our salvation. The same message that moves us to believe and trust moves us also to love. Once one believes the Gospel and so knows something of God’s great love for him, the question is no longer: How can I love God? The question is: How can I not love God who loves me so much?

How can I love my neighbour? How can I love my enemy? How can I love all other people as I love myself? How can I want what is best for them? How can I begin to love others? On my own, I cannot love others.

The answer is the Gospel. God turns me into a lover by telling me of His love for me and for all people. If I am aware of God’s love for me in Christ - and of God’s love for you and for him and for her and for them in Christ - it becomes rather harder to hate, easier to love. If I look at another person - any other person - and say to myself: God loves him the same as He loves me, and Jesus loved him enough to die for him as well as for me; it is hard to stay angry, to bear a grudge, to go on hating.

Only believers in Christ have this motivation to love. But for them, it is a powerful motivation. For them to go on hating, they would positively have to resist the Gospel. They would fall from faith and grace.

But it is not simple. It is not easy. It is not a one-time cure. One who has been brought to faith still struggles with doubt. One who has been brought to love still struggles with hate. We Christians are flesh and spirit, old man and new man. The old Adam is a hater. Flesh hates. Spirit loves. The old sinful nature does not love. The new spiritual nature does not hate. We have that conflict throughout our Christian lives in this world. So our love, even as our faith, must be renewed, rebuilt, and rejuvenated by repeated contact with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In heaven, there will be no more hate, no more struggle with hate. Then and there, we shall love God and the neighbour as we ought. That will be a big part of the joy of heaven.