

Beloved

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The Bible tells us that God loves us. Specifically it tells us that the Father so loved the world that He sent His Son to save the world (John 3:16-17), that the Son loved us and died for our sins (Gal. 2:20) and that the Holy Spirit pours the love of God into our hearts (Rom. 5:5). Each of the Persons of the Trinity loves us and they love us in distinct ways. We are bound to God therefore by a threefold cord of love that can never be broken.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

What then shall we say to these things?

If God is for us, who can be against us?

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all,

how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

Who shall bring a charge against God's elect?

It is God who justifies.

Who is he who condemns?

It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

As it is written:

“For Your sake we are killed all day long;

We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”

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Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Father loves the world that He has created and seeks the salvation of the world at tremendous personal cost. We must remember the story of Abraham offering up Isaac. God said to Abraham, "Take now your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love . . . and offer him . . ." (Gen. 22:2). This was a hard command. Why did God give it? Was it merely to test Abraham? No, not at all. Though it was a test of Abraham's faith, it was far more than that. God was showing us in concrete terms what it means for Him to offer up His Son, to send His Son into the world to suffer for us so that we could better understand the love of the Father and the sacrifice that He made in sending the Son.

The Son bore our sins on the cross. This means that Jesus endured the judgment for sin that we deserve. He who was holy and harmless would be judged as a sinner. When Jesus anticipated that judgment He was afraid and prayed to God that the cup of judgment might be taken from Him, if possible (Mat. 26:39, 42, 44). Jesus' prayer is recorded so that we can have a glimpse into what it meant for Him to die. It was not the physical fact of death itself that Jesus feared. It was from death as the punishment for the sins of the world, from death as God's wrath, that He turned. But, as Paul shows us in Philippians 2:1-11, Jesus considered us as more important than Himself (Phil. 2:3). He gave our interests and needs a higher priority than His own (Phil. 2:4). Therefore He became a man and suffered even the death of the cross.

The Holy Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son to indwell us and to testify in our hearts of God's love. He bears witness with our spirits that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16) and because we are the children of God, He enables us to cry out unto God, "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15). The Holy Spirit, then, is the Person of the Trinity who repeatedly draws us unto God and assures and encourages us that God loves us, that He will forgive our sins if we only return unto Him. The Spirit is the one who assures us that the prodigal is always welcome. Thus, when Paul says that He pours forth the love of God in our hearts (Rom. 5:5), he is speaking of the way the Spirit Himself loves us. He dwells in us and fills us with grace, comfort and peace. He loves us and He makes sure that we know He loves us.

Each of the Persons of the Trinity loves us, then, in His own distinct way, a truth which offers us threefold profound comfort. But there is more. We need to add that each of the Persons of the Trinity loves us *for the sake of the others*. The Father loves us because by faith we are in Christ. He only sees us in relation to His Son and through Him. As much as the Father loves the Son, so much He loves those who are in the Son, as our Lord Himself show us in His prayer to the Father.

I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be perfected into one, and that the world may know that Thou didst send me, and didst love them as Thou didst love me. Father, those whom Thou hast given to me, I will that where I am they also may be with me, that they may behold my glory that Thou didst give to me, because Thou didst love me before the foundation of the world. Righteous Father, also the world did not know Thee, and I knew Thee, and these have known that Thou didst send me,

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and I made known to them Thy name, and will make known, that the love with which Thou lovedst me in them may be, and I in them. (John 17:23-26)

We see, too, that the Son loves us because of the Father. In this same prayer, Jesus refers to His people over and over as the ones whom the Father has given Him (John 17:2, 6, 9, 11, 12, 24). Because the Son loves the Father, He loves those who are given to Him by the Father. For, we are the love gift of the Father to the Son and the Son cherishes us as such.

The Holy Spirit loves us for the sake of the Father and the Son, for in the Word of God, the Spirit testifies of the love of Father and Son and then writes that same word of assurance and hope in our hearts. He is the Spirit of love who brings to God's people the love of God and delights in us because God chose us in love before the foundation of the world.

The Bible tells us then of a rich and comforting love, one that is certain and sure because it is not only grounded in what God has determined to do for us, but in what the Persons of the Trinity do for one another. Could the Father fail the Son? Or the Son the Father? No. And because we are in the Son, the Father will never fail us. Because we are given by the Father to the Son, the Son will never fail us. The Spirit who indwells us and testifies of God's wonderful love for us will never leave us or forsake us.

It may sometimes appear that we are like sheep for the slaughter. It may appear that God has forgotten us. That is also how it appeared in the case of Jesus. The Pharisees mocked Him when He hung on the cross: "Let God save you now, if He delights in you." But the suffering that Jesus endured did not mean the Father was displeased with Him or that His love had grown cold. God loved His Son especially in His suffering. The same is true for us. In suffering trial and persecution, we are more than conquerors, because when we suffer adversity for the sake of righteousness, we are most like our Lord.

But what if we sin? It was to give sinners hope that Jesus told us the parable of the prodigal. He told us of a father who longed for his son's return and He rebuked the Pharisees for not understanding that God's love was greater than man's. If an earthly father will welcome a repentant son, how much more will our Father in heaven welcome us? He will welcome us for our own sake, because He has set His love upon us. He will welcome us for the sake of Jesus who died for us. He will welcome us for the sake of His Spirit who indwells us. If we have sinned, we should return to the Father in humble repentance, but also in trustful assurance.

For we are beloved of God – beloved of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, forever and ever, Amen!