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#1394

Where Can I Find Real Love?

One of the many reasons I have for believing in God as opposed to atheism is the concept of love. Here we've just come off of Valentines day with cards, Pajama Grams, and Vermont Teddy bears. In fact, Americans spend around \$17 billion each Valentines day.

I can't prove that there is a God any more than an atheist can prove that there isn't. You can't put God under a microscope. What I can do though, is look at life and the world around me and ask the question which view is the better fit?

The Oxford philosopher Richard Swinburne has a book entitled *Is There A God?* In it he argues this, The view that there is a God leads us to expect the things we observe - that there is a universe at all, that scientific laws operate within it, that it contains human beings with consciousness and with an indelible moral sense. The theory that there is no God does not lead us to expect any of these things. Therefore belief in God offers a better empirical fit. It explains and accounts for what we see better than the alternative account of things.

I would add to that the mystery of this thing we call love. Why do men and women have this emotional attachment to each other that causes them to sacrifice for and care for one another?

Why does a mother love her child? Is it because of some ancient evolutionary drive to preserve the race? Then why does that mother love her disabled child? Why does she love her child that's been diagnosed with a fatal disease? That certainly doesn't fit with the assumptions of survival of the fittest.

What is love? Where can we find it? And, why do we human beings so desperately seek love?

The Bible claims to be God's message to the planet. It claims to tell us everything we need to know about how to live life. Obviously we would expect it to fill us in on something as important as love. So that's where we're going to turn this morning.

I. When You Are In Love, You Want To Be With The One You Love

When a guy and a girl are in love they go to great lengths to be with one another. When you're in love you'll drive for hours to be together, even if it's just for a short time.

Staying up late to talk when you know you have to get up early for work or school? No problem. Walking in the rain is romantic, not annoying. When you're apart from each other, it's painful, even miserable. He or she is all you think about. You jump at any chance to be together.

When Sandy and I were dating we'd come home from a date and the first thing I'd do was call her. I remember my parents asking me, "What in the world do you guys still have to talk about? You've just spent hours with each other!" Looking back, I have no idea what we talked about all that time but we never seemed to run out of things to say.

In his book *God Is The Gospel*, John Piper essentially asks whether we're in love with God.

"The critical question for our generation, and for every generation, is this: If you could have heaven, with no sickness, and with all the friends you've ever had on earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties you ever saw, all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, would you be satisfied with heaven, if Christ was not there?"

Some people could hear those words and say, "You know, I just might be OK with that." But see, if you and I are really deeply in love with God we know just the opposite is true. We know that if it was just Jesus, and not all those other things, we could be satisfied.

If you're at all familiar with the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy what do you think of when you hear the name Deuteronomy. Do you think of myriads of rules, regulations, and laws?

Those are there. In fact "Deuteronomy" literally means "second law." It's God repeating His law to a new generation of Israelites before they enter the promised land.

So there's plenty of "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not." But look what else is there...

Turn to Deuteronomy chapter 6 Page 165

Read verse 5, 7:9, 10:12, 11:13 & 22

You get the idea? There's 11 references to loving God in the book of Deuteronomy. The only other book that tops that is the book of I John. No other book even comes close.

In the middle of God spelling out over 600 commandments for His people, He wanted

them to know what was going to motivate them. The key was their love for Him.

In his book, "Crazy Love," Francis Chan writes, "Personal experience has taught me that actions driven by fear and guilt are not an antidote to lukewarm, selfish, comfortable living. I hope you realize instead that the answer is love."

"Don't we all love love? Don't we all crave it. And isn't that what God wants of us - to crave this relationship with Him as we crave all genuine love relationships? Isn't that what brings Him glory - when believers desire Him and are not merely slaves who serve Him out of obligation?"

He goes on then to ask this question... "Why do so few people genuinely find joy and pleasure in their relationship with God?"

Why do most people feel they either have to pay God back for all He's done (buy His love) or somehow keep making up for all their inadequacies and failures (prove their love)?"

I. When You Are In Love, You Want To Be With The One You Love

II. Extreme Intimacy With God Should Be Our Goal

Some of my favorite scripture is in the Psalms. One of the reasons is because there's such a range of human emotions in the Psalms.

Turn with me to Psalm 18 Page 487 Read vs 1-3

Psalm 23 Read verses 1-3

Psalm 34 Read verses 1-8

Psalm 90:14 *Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy, That we may rejoice and be glad all our days!*

Psalm 91:1 *He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.*

Psalm 142:5 *I cried out to You, O LORD: I said, "You are my refuge, My portion in the land of the living.*

Have you ever felt like that level of intimacy with God is unattainable? Remember the writers of the Psalms were people just like you and me. They had the same questions,

the same doubts, the same sin nature.

They enjoyed a closeness with God that should be the norm for all of us. We should be communicating the same kind of words to God as they did in the Psalms. I hope you're not satisfied just knowing about God.

That's what the world's religions teach. You can know about God. Biblical Christianity takes things to a whole other level. You start with the facts about God but then you move to a relationship.

The facts are straightforward. The Bible says,

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you--unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. I Corinthians 15:1-4

Those are the facts. Jesus Christ went to the cross to die for our sins and then He rose again. Now notice how understanding the facts leads to a relationship.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name. John 1:12

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. I John 3:2

Faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ makes us children of God. You can't get much more intimate than that.

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! I John 3:1

But now, what if we don't love God like we should? The solution isn't to try harder, fail, and then make big promises to God, only to fail again.

If loving God becomes just something on our "to do" list we're in trouble. When loving God becomes just another obligation we end up focusing a whole lot more on ourselves than on Him.

Part of the key is to really get to understand and know God by spending time with Him. The Bible says, *Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.* James 4:8

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III. God Is Our Great Example Of Real Love

Turn to I John 4 Page 1084 Read verses 9-10

If a guy says to a girl, "I love you," but he never calls, never comes by, never has any time for her she's going to figure out real quickly that he doesn't love her at all. Love acts.

God has revealed His love. He's demonstrated it. He's communicated His love through an undeniable action.

God's not just a lot of talk. The greatest, clearest, indisputable expression of God's love is His giving of His Son for us.

Now just stop and let that truth sink in for a moment. We're talking about God. He doesn't owe us anything. He is completely self-existent. He is the Lord of all. The King of the universe. Not only that but He knows every dark and hidden secret of our heart.

What's His reaction? Is it anger, rejection, judgment, wrath? Did He pour down fire and brimstone on this world of sinners? No, just the opposite. He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins so that we might live through Him.

He responded with the most costly of all loves. God Himself came in the person of His Son, lived among us, and died on a cross of shame in the very world His hands had made. He gave life to the very tree that was chopped down and fashioned into a cross. He formed the thorns that were pressed into His head. He knit His executioners together in their mothers' wombs.

Where does this love originate? Not with us. We don't have a clue. Love originates with God. But notice, it's a love that is constrained and guided by God's righteousness and holiness.

God, as our great example of real love, did something astounding. He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Propitiation is one of those great theological terms that sometimes gets lost in our

modern translations.

It's a translation of the noun form of the verb *hilaskomai*. That word is used in another verse. Hebrews 9:5. There we read, *And behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant... and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat.* Hebrews 9:3-5

In the holy of holies, the very heart of Jewish worship was the ark of the covenant. Contained in the ark, which was a box, was the 2 tablets with the 10 commandments written by God. Over the ark was a golden lid called the mercy seat.

Gold in the Bible signifies God's righteousness. At each end was a golden figure with wings that extended over the mercy seat. Those figures were called cherubim, guardians of God's glory.

In Hebrew the mercy seat was known as *hakapporeth*, which means the place of covering. The Hebrew word *kaphar* (meaning covering) is translated as "atonement" throughout the Hebrew scriptures.

Once a year, on Yom Kipper (the day of atonement) the high priest would enter into the holy of holies and sprinkle the blood of a sacrifice on the mercy seat to cover the sins of the people.

As a spiritual picture then, the gold lid of the ark was a mercy seat because in righteousness it covered from the eyes of the cherubim the broken law of God while the blood of the sacrifice covered the worshippers sins. The mercy seat was the one place on earth where a holy God would meet with sinful humanity.

You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the Testimony that I will give you. And there I will meet with you. Exodus 25:21

Now back to I John 4:10. Jesus Christ is the mercy seat, the propitiation, because He's the only one that can bring sinful humanity together with a holy God.

He's the mercy seat sprinkled with His own blood. He's the High priest, the sacrifice, and the mercy seat!

And what's so important to remember is that this concept isn't found any any other religion that's ever existed. Other religions have gods who are angry and need to be appeased. Biblical Christianity presents a holy God who is offended by our sin but then offers the sacrifice that's due.

He's not bought off by our works or by our religious actions. His holiness is satisfied by the sacrifice of Christ. Jesus died to pay for sin, not just to cover it. God's holiness is satisfied and His love is shown in a holy way to all who receive Jesus Christ as Savior.

This is what love is.

People wonder, how can there be evil in our world if God is love? How can there be a good God in the midst of pain and injustice? What can we say to the hurting people of this world who ask, "How can you say that God is love?"

There's really only one answer, isn't there? *In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.*

God is our great example of real love. This is why love exists at all in our world. There's no blind, materialistic, evolutionary explanation of love. It comes from the ultimate lover of our souls, God Himself.

You know what the greatest sin in the whole world is? It isn't lying, cheating, unfaithfulness, or even murder. Those are all horrible things. There's no justification for them but the greatest sin is to say to the God who sent His Son, "Sorry, but I don't need the cross. I'm a good person. I practice my religion. I'm good to people. So I don't need a Savior."

That's the ultimate offence against the greatest lover of all times. "Sorry God, but I don't want your love. Not if it means that I have to admit my sin and my helplessness. Not if it means that I have to humble my self and admit I need a Savior."

The Bible says if we reject that love, then in eternity. God will reject us.

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II. Extreme Intimacy With God Should Be Our Goal

III. God Is Our Great Example Of Real Love

IV. God's Love Is Reality, Not Sentimentality

Turn to John 16 page 958

If you knew you had 24 hours to live you'd probably expect your friends to come along side you and support you. You'd expect them to have words of encouragement.

On the last night of Jesus' life instead of His disciples encouraging Him, Jesus spent time encouraging them. John chapters 13-17 is the record of what He had to say. We

call this the upper room discourse.

Jesus prayed for His disciples, washed their feet, and gave them powerful promises about the Holy Spirit.

At the end of chapter 16 He gave them one last promise. **Read verse 33**

That's probably not one they wanted to hear. *In the world you will have tribulation.* "It's going to be tough out there, guys. I'm not going to sugar coat the harsh reality of living in a fallen, sinful world. But you can cheer up because I've overcome the world."

Jesus was speaking proleptically here. He was talking as if the cross and the empty tomb had already happened because in His mind it was as good as done.

"I have over come the world so don't let the tribulations of life get you down. In fact, your Heavenly Father, the lover of your souls wants you to cheer up. Remember He's accomplishing His purposes in the midst of the tribulations."

We tend to think, if God loves us then we shouldn't ever suffer pain or heartache. In fact, when we have a sentimental view of love that's all emotion, instead of a God-centered view of love we have a self-centered view of life.

God's love does what it takes to accomplish the goal. The cross proves that. But God's love isn't always neat and clean. Sometimes it's kind of messy.

John Mark McMillan is a singer, song writer who's penned some powerful songs of worship. One night during a prayer meeting, a youth pastor and best friend of McMillians named Steven was praying and said, "Lord, I would give my life today if it would shake the youth of the nation. " Later that night, Steven died in a car accident.

John Mark McMillian became a youth leader and then a youth pastor himself. Nearly three years later, he wrote a song called How He Loves Us. In that song he included a line that's really confused a lot of people.

The song goes:

*We are His portion and He is our prize,
Drawn to redemption by the grace in His eyes,
If grace is an ocean, we're all sinking.
And Heaven meets earth like a sloppy wet kiss,
And my heart turns violently inside of my chest,*

*I don't have time to maintain these regrets,
When I think about, the way...*

*That He loves us so,
Oh how He loves us,
How He loves us so.*

People said, "Man, that sloppy wet kiss thing is kind of weird." Several people have recorded the song and changed the lyrics. Here's what McMillan says about that line. I thought this was profound.

"The idea behind the lyric is that the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of earth converge in a way that is both beautiful and awkwardly messy. Think about the birth of a child, or even the death of Jesus himself. These miracles are both incredibly beautiful and incredibly sloppy ("gory" may be more realistic, but "Heaven meets earth like a gory mess" didn't seem to have the same ring)."

When Jesus died on the cross it was the greatest demonstration of true love that the world would ever see. But listen, there was nothing pretty about it. The cross involved blood, sweat, spit, stench, and shame. It was ugly. And yet it was the mercy seat in action. God was meeting humanity.

There's another verse that's so personal that only McMillan recorded it for his album. Weeping he says about God,

*Some people try to tell me your true
But if Steven could sing, he'd say it's not true
Cause You're good...*

See we want everything nice and pretty. No tears. No suffering. No pain and heartache. That's what we think of when we think of love. We mix up sentimentality and love. God clarifies it all for us.

His love is real. His love is genuine. His love doesn't preclude suffering.

How do you respond to God's love? Do you say, "That's the God I can trust. That's the God who is the hope of my salvation. That's the God that I want to follow no matter what."

Or do you say, "I want a god who makes life go smoothly. I want a god who's going to keep me happy. I want a god who gives me what I want. I want a sentimental god, not

the Holy God of the Bible.”

Maybe this morning you say, “I have trusted Christ as Savior but I still have a hard time loving God back. I know He loves me but I’m going through life and something’s not right. I’m not close to Him like I should be.”

You know what you should do? Don’t try to fool God. He already knows where your heart is at. Instead tell Him where you are right now. Tell Him He’s not the most important thing in your life but that you want that to begin to change today.

If that’s you let me suggest a prayer to get you pointed in the right direction. *“Jesus, I need to give myself up. I’m not strong enough to love You and walk with You on my own. I can’t do it. I need You. I need You deeply and desperately. I know in my mind that Your worth is above all things this earth could ever afford. Work in my heart so I know it there too. I want You. And when I don’t I want to want You. Be all in and through me. God, start me on that path of true love today. Amen”*

where can I find real love? We have to back to the source of love Himself.