

## **Romans (48)** **God's Love for His Elect**

Today, if the Lord is willing, we will complete our consideration of the paragraph that we have been addressing for a number of weeks and move on to the next paragraph, which is a conclusion of all that the apostle had written to this point in his epistle. But let us read our present paragraph once more in its entirety.

<sup>26</sup>Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. <sup>27</sup>And He who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. <sup>28</sup>And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose. <sup>29</sup>For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup>And those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified he also glorified.

Last Lord's Day we addressed more fully the last clause in verse 29, "For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, *in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers.*" God had determined from eternity that His Son would be the King over a great kingdom. We are the citizens of this eternal kingdom with Jesus Christ our blessed King. This is a glorious description of our relationship with God through Christ and it speaks to the glorious future that true believers have in Him. But as wonderful as this image is regarding the believers relationship with God through His Son, it is but one of many in Scriptures. For there are aspects of our relationship with Jesus Christ that may be better understood using metaphors other than the idea of the *kingdom*. We have one used here in conjunction with the truth that we have an integral place and part in the eternal kingdom of God. For here we also read that the Father purposed that His Son's eternal kingdom would also be a great *family*. Jesus Christ would be the head of the household but His family would include multitudes of brothers and sisters who would share in His rule and share in the benefits and privileges of His kingly rule. All of the redeemed, from the earliest believer (Adam?) to the last of God's elect that comes to faith, are to be regarded as brothers and sisters within the family of God.<sup>1</sup>

But God has used other metaphors in Scripture to describe the relationship we have with Him and His Son. For example, we read that *Jesus Christ is the husband of His bride, the Church*. We who are reformed understand His bride to be comprised of all of those through history who are redeemed through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Dispensationalists, however, in their effort to maintain a distinction between Israel and the church, maintaining that they are two separate people who have different relationships with God and different destinies determined by God, argue that only New Testament believers are members of Christ's bride, but all believers living before the cross of Christ, until the person and ministry of John the Baptist, are not members of Christ's Church, His bride, but rather they are only *friends* of the bridegroom. They use the account in **John 3:29ff** to argue their point:

<sup>25</sup>Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. <sup>26</sup>And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness--look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." <sup>27</sup>John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing

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<sup>1</sup> We need to be careful as we press the application of these images. For example, Abraham is always portrayed as our father, not our brother. He is the father of all the faithful. Romans 4:16 and 17 read, "That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring--not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations'--in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist."

unless it is given him from heaven. <sup>28</sup>You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before Him.' <sup>29</sup>***The One who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom***, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. (John 3:25-29)

Dispensationalists argue that John the Baptist, and therefore all Jewish believers like him before the cross, would not identify himself as a part of the bride of Christ, but only the bridegroom's friends, therefore, Israel is the friend of the bridegroom, not the bride.

But there is a problem with this position. Bible interpreters need to be careful to avoid importing the meaning of a metaphor used somewhere in Scripture and import that meaning into another context. John the Baptist was not declaring that he and Jews were not in the Church, the bride of Christ. He may have been unaware of the metaphor of the people of God as the bride of Christ. All he was asserting here is that just as the bridegroom is the central character in a wedding, not his friend, so John was saying that Jesus Christ was preeminent. John the Baptist was using the metaphor of the bridegroom and his friend to show his subordination to Jesus Christ. He was not expressing the idea that he and all Jews are not members of the bride of Christ.

This can be shown by looking at the same metaphor used in a different context but used completely differently. In Matthew 9 we read of some of John the Baptist's disciples coming to Jesus and asking why His disciples did not fast as they were accustomed to doing.

<sup>14</sup>Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"

<sup>15</sup>And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast." (Matt. 9:14f)

Here the Lord Jesus refers to His own disciples as "wedding guests"; i.e. friends. Does this mean that they are not part of "the Church" the bride of Christ? Of course not, for the metaphor here is concerned with a "bridegroom" and "the wedding guests." There is no mention of the bride or her identity in this context. That is a different metaphor found in other contexts, but not in this one. And so, care must be taken to avoid taking the meaning of a term in one context and imposing it uncritically into another context. And so, depending on the context, the Lord's people may be depicted as "brothers", "friends of a bridegroom," or "brothers" of the king, or any other of a number of images used in Scripture to depict our identity and relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Let us now give our attention to Romans 8:30. "And those whom He ***predestined*** He also ***called***, and those whom He called He also ***justified***, and those whom he justified he also ***glorified***." Prior to arriving to this verse we have already considered each of these terms mentioned in detail. Two weeks ago we dealt with "predestination." The week before that we addressed God "foreknowing" His people. Here we read that all that He predestined in eternity, He "called." We have addressed this matter of God's calling of His elect unto salvation. All those that He had predestined in eternity that they would be conformed to the image of His Son, at the time of God's determination, He called them to come in repentance from sin turning toward Him, exercising faith in Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul wrote of the occasion of His own calling in Galatians 1:15f, "But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and ***who called me by his grace***, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone..." He also spoke of the calling of the Christians at Thessalonica in similar terms.

<sup>13</sup>But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God ***chose*** you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. <sup>14</sup>To this he ***called*** you through our gospel, so that you may obtain ***the glory*** of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 2:13f).

Here we read of God having chosen them unto their salvation. God called them and did so through the gospel that Paul had preached to them. And here we also read that God had called them unto salvation to the end that they would glorified.

And then everyone He called resulted in God having *justified* them. “Those whom He called He also *justified*.” God justifies the ungodly when they believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. They are justified through faith *alone*. This was the great truth that **Martin Luther** recovered and proclaimed thus beginning the Protestant Reformation. Paul wrote in Romans 3:21f, “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it-- the righteousness of God *through faith* in Jesus Christ *for all who believe*.”

Justification involves a two-fold blessing. First, there is the pronouncement of God’s *forgiveness* of sins through the death of Jesus who had died as their substitute, the righteous for the unrighteous. But second, God also pronounces the believing sinner to be *righteous*. God gives believers the gift of *righteousness*, which is the righteousness of the life of Christ credited to the account of those who believe on Him as Lord and Savior. “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21)

And then we read that all whom God justified, He *glorified*. We have also addressed the matter of our future glorification. This has been the major theme of Romans 8. Our glorification will be at the resurrection of our bodies when we will experience the full disclosure of our adopted status as sons of God. In order to once again bring this truth vividly before us, let us read the portion of this chapter that we have already examined regarding this matter:

<sup>16</sup>The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that *we are children of God*, <sup>17</sup>and if children, then heirs--*heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ*, provided we suffer with him in order *that we may also be glorified with him*. <sup>18</sup>For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with *the glory that is to be revealed to us*. <sup>19</sup>For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of *the sons of God*. <sup>20</sup>For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup>that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of *the glory of the children of God*. <sup>22</sup>For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. <sup>23</sup>And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as *we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies*. <sup>24</sup>For in this hope we were saved. (Rom. 8:16-24)

We have stated before that the five blessings that God has conferred upon us by His grace are depicted through five active verbs—God foreknew us; God predestined us; God called us; God justified us; God glorified us. Each of these active verbs is conveyed in a tense of the Greek verb (the aorist tense) to show that it is something that God has already done, or rather, because He decreed that He would take these actions on behalf of His people, they are expressed in a tense to show that they have already taken place. This is the case also with our being glorified. Even though none of us have yet to be glorified, for that will take place at our resurrection of the dead, it is already a settled fact, so Paul expressed it as though God had already glorified us.

But let us now direct our attention to the next paragraph of Romans 8. This is a conclusion to all that Paul has written to this point in His epistle.

<sup>31</sup>What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup>He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup>Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup>Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. <sup>35</sup>Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>36</sup>As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;  
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

<sup>37</sup>No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup>nor height nor

depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is the zenith of Paul's epistle thus far. It is the apostle's finale to his extensive exposition of God's grace in bringing salvation to His people. Here is an excellent summary of this passage within the context of the epistle:

The magnificent and exalted style in these verses is immediately apparent, and the beauty of the text may be unrivaled in all of Pauline literature. These verses function as an *inclusio* with 5:1-11, for both texts feature the confidence that comes from the hope of believers. The text also brings to climax chapter 8. Verses 1-17 emphasize the transformation wrought in believers. The Holy Spirit has given all believers a new heart so that they desire to keep God's commandments. This renewal fortifies the hope of believers, for it is a foretaste of the redemption that will be consummated on the day of the resurrection. The hope of believers, therefore, is not dashed by the sufferings of the present era (vv. 18-20). The presence of the Spirit gives them confidence that the hope of salvation will be obtained in the future. Their hope is also unshakeable because the Spirit prays for them in and through their groanings, and God invariably answers the prayers of the Spirit with a yes. This is simply another way of saying that everything works out for the good of believers. The "good" Paul has in mind is not earthly bliss and comfort. He has already said that believers groan and suffer in the present age. The good is conformity to their brother and Lord, Jesus Christ. God weaves every detail of life together so that believers become more like Jesus Christ. When believers reflect on God's salvific work, they can be assured that this goal will be reached. God set his covenantal love upon them, predestined them to be like Jesus, called them effectually to new life, made them right with God, and will certainly glorify them. This glorification is simply another way of saying that they will be like Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

And so, here in Romans 8:31ff Paul attempted to enlarge the hearts of his readers and expand their faith and assurance of the immeasurable love of God that He has for His people who are in Jesus Christ. This passage is a faith builder. It is a heart stirrer. It is a worship enhancer. Assurance of the eternal unending love of God for one's soul strengthens the believer to endure whatever he may be called to experience.

Now as we approach this passage let me underscore a very important truth that is understood by few, even among many professing Christians. The Holy Spirit has set before us through the pen of Paul *the great love that God has for His elect*, the redeemed of all of history. It is a love that God has for His people and *for no others*. It is a love for them that He has that is in Christ Jesus.

In contradiction to this biblical teaching, most people commonly assume, but falsely, that God loves all people alike. And very often well intentioned but errant thinking Christians seek to witness to non-Christians by telling them of God's great love that He has for them. They take a verse like John 3:16, "For God so loved the world" and then run with a distortion of its teaching assuming that God loves everybody alike. But the Holy Scriptures do not teach that this is the nature of God's love toward people, as our passage amply testifies. God has a love for His people in Christ that is especially theirs, that those outside of Jesus Christ will never know. And so, let us take a few minutes to rehearse this important matter.

Now indeed, the Bible pronounces and illustrates throughout its pages that our God is a loving God. Perhaps the clearest statement of this truth is a verse in the little epistle of 1 John, which reads, "And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love; and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16). This is a truth that is acknowledged by all who call themselves Christians. And yet, though the truth is commonly held and commonly affirmed, it is a subject that is commonly misunderstood. **John MacArthur** once wrote, "Love is the best known but least understood of all of God's attributes."<sup>3</sup> False assumptions are held by many; false assertions are made about God's love. **J. I. Packer** described it this way.

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *Romans* (Baker Academic, 1998), p. 456.

<sup>3</sup> John MacArthur, *The Love of God* (Word Pub. 1996), p. 1.

St. John's twice-repeated statement, "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16), is one of the most tremendous utterances of the Bible--and also one of the most misunderstood. False ideas have grown up round it like a hedge of thorns, hiding its real meaning from view, and it is no small task cutting through this tangle of mental undergrowth.<sup>4</sup>

But many take the thought that God is love and then run with it, forming all manner of false thoughts about the nature of God and His ways among the peoples of the earth. The Bible states that God is love, but the Bible also defines what that love is like. "Scripture does not merely say 'God is love' and leave it to the individual to interpret subjectively what that means."<sup>5</sup> Many, however, have done this. For example, there are those that suggest that because God is love, that He is easy to mollify toward sin and sinners. He does not look upon sin as a great evil to be punished with His eternal wrath, but merely as an unfortunate malady that needs healing. They then take their shallow, skewed concept of divine love and apply it as a means to justify their behavior and to form and shape a "christianity" that suits them.

They envision God as a benign heavenly grandfather--tolerant, affable, lenient, and permissive, devoid of any real displeasure over sin, who without consideration of His holiness will benignly pass over sin and accept people as they are.<sup>6</sup>

For example, if they are to excuse in themselves and in others what the Scriptures condemns, if they are to eradicate from their belief system those teachings that are offensive to their sensibilities, then they simply use love, as they have redefined it, as an overarching principle by which to judge the Scriptures. They say that since God is love, that nothing else matters, such as doctrine, sound theology. **D. Martin Lloyd-Jones** wrote,

The great tendency in this present century has been to put as an antithesis the idea of God as a God of love on the one side, and theology or dogma on the other. Now the average person has generally taken up such a position as follows, "You know, I am not interested in your doctrine. Surely the great mistake of the church has been made throughout the centuries is all this talk about dogma, all this doctrine about sin, and the doctrine of the atonement, and this idea of justification and sanctification. Of course there are some people who may be interested in that kind of thing; they may enjoy reading and arguing about it, but as for myself," says the man, "there does not seem to be any truth in it; all I say is that God is love." So he puts up this idea of God as love over against all these doctrines, which the church has taught throughout the centuries.<sup>7</sup> (MacArthur, p. 36)

Lloyd-Jones went on to assert that these people who set the love of God against these other teachings reveal themselves to "know nothing whatsoever about the love of God." Ultimately the love of God cannot be understood apart from the issues surrounding God's action in bringing sinners into a relationship with Himself through Jesus Christ.

But perhaps the point of greatest confusion about this subject is due to the failure to distinguish the *special love* that God has for His chosen people, over against the *general love* He has for the whole world. There is a tendency for people to assume that God loves all people alike; consequently, they draw wrong conclusions about how God views people and how they relate to Him. Granted, there is a general love that God has for mankind, but there is a special love, a redeeming love, that unbelievers will never know for its objects are God's people only. Let us seek to understand this distinction.

## **I. First, let us consider the general love of God that He extends to all people in all places.**

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<sup>4</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Intervarsity Press, ), p. 106.

<sup>5</sup> MacArthur, p.106.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 36.

**Indeed, God loves all that He has created.** Upon God having created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, He pronounced them good. Genesis 1:31, “And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.” God was well pleased with His creation and delighted in it. He is said to “rejoice over all His works” (Psa. 104:31).

God delights particularly in the intelligent creatures He made, both angels and people. They are objects of His attention, concern, protection and provision. God has a general love to all men, because they are *His* creatures, *His* offspring, and the work of *His* hands. We read of God’s concern for them in Acts 17:28, “For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also his offspring.’”

God is loving not just to His people, but is loving to *all* people. The Lord Jesus gave the commandment to His disciples for them to love their enemies so that they would be like their heavenly Father who Himself is loving toward His enemies:

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matt. 5:44f)

**God’s general love for sinners is seen in that He is *gracious to sinners.*** There is nothing in fallen man that moves God to extend His grace to them. Sin has rendered mankind itself odious before a holy God. Here is a common error: *many assume that God loves sinners because there is something lovely that elicits His affection for them.* God is gracious toward fallen man because God is loving, not because fallen man is loveable. The very nature of grace suggests that His favor is extended apart from merit. When we read of how sin is depicted in the Scriptures before a holy God, then this false notion will dissipate.

**God’s general love for sinners is seen in that He is *He is merciful to sinners.*** There is nothing in fallen man that warrants God to extend mercy to him. By its very nature, mercy is undeserved. Mercy cannot be demanded; it must be freely bestowed. Mercy is God not giving people what they deserve. Sinners deserve God’s eternal displeasure and punishment. That He grants them time and opportunity to repent, is great mercy, totally undeserved by them. It is due solely to the love of God that He does not immediately bring history to a close and pour out His wrath upon this world.

**God’s general love for sinners is seen in that He is *slow to anger.*** God’s love for sinners is manifest in His patience toward them. We see God’s patience displayed in our Lord Jesus’ words pronounced over rebellious Jerusalem.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like unto whitewashed tombs, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets, and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, “If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.”

Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are the sons of those who killed the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers’ guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come on you all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those that are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Matt. 23:37-47)

Several points may be made with respect to this passage. First, although these people were guilty sinners deserving of God's wrath, **God desired their well being.** He continually sent messengers to them calling them informing them of their sin and calling upon them to turn back to God. Second, God had been **slow to anger** with respect to them. The sins mentioned by our Lord were committed over the course of centuries. Third, God's patience with them did not lessen their punishment, but rather **their lack of response to God's patient dealing with them compounded their guilt, aggravating their condemnation.** God does not immediately pour out His wrath upon sinners because He is patient toward them. Fourth, but God's love is seen even toward them, in that **He continually desired their repentance from sin and turning back to Him right to the end.**

**God's general love for sinners is abundant in lovingkindness.** God is good even to His enemies. We might illustrate this from the life of Elisha. We read in 2 Kings 6 of God's lovingkindness extended through His prophet to sinners who were bent on destroying His prophet. Elisha was a seer, who could know the King of Syria's war strategy so as to warn Israel and facilitate their preservation. The king of Syria heard this and sought to capture Elisha. We read of what happened in **2 Kings 6:14-23.**

Therefore he sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city. <sup>15</sup>And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?"

<sup>16</sup>So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."  
<sup>17</sup>And Elisha prayed, and said, "LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

<sup>18</sup>So when the Syrians came down to him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, and said, "Strike this people, I pray, with blindness." And He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.

<sup>19</sup>Now Elisha said to them, "This is not the way, nor is this the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." But he led them to Samaria.

<sup>20</sup>So it was, when they had come to Samaria, that Elisha said, "LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see." And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and there they were, inside Samaria!

<sup>21</sup>Now when the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, "My father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?"

<sup>22</sup>But he answered, "You shall not kill them. Would you kill those whom you have taken captive with your sword and your bow? Set food and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master."

<sup>23</sup>Then he prepared a great feast for them; and after they ate and drank, he sent them away and they went to their master. So the bands of Syrian raiders came no more into the land of Israel. (2Ki 6:14 NKJ)

Rather than exterminating this army, Elisha, displaying the lovingkindness of God toward sinners, fed their enemies and sent them on their way.

**God's general love for sinners is God is seen in that He relents from doing harm.** We read in the Scriptures that God does not take pleasure in pouring out His wrath upon sinners. He makes no apology for it. He is right in doing so, but He does not delight in doing so. To rebellious Israel, God declared:

Say unto them, "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek. 33:11)

But the **epitome of God's general love toward sinners is in the giving of His Son to die, so that sinners might be saved.** We read of this, of course, throughout Scripture, but perhaps most clearly in John 3:16 and 17.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

Here we see the full love of God toward sinners manifested. We see in His giving of His Son that indeed He is a *gracious* and *merciful* God, *slow to anger* and *abundant in lovingkindness*, One *who relents from doing harm*. That He would make a way of escape for guilty sinners through bearing God's wrath due them, is love in action.

We may consider three concluding thoughts regarding God's general love for all mankind. **First, the nature of God's love gives hope to poor, needy, repentant sinners.** Sinners may take heart in that God will receive them for Christ's sake. Although they are deserving of His wrath, He freely offers pardon and peace to them through Christ. **Second, the nature of God's love aggravates the condemnation of unbelievers.** Herein is a great mistake. Most people in our land know and, I would venture to say, even believe John 3:16. They falsely assume, however, that this lessons their responsibility and culpability before God. The gospel of Jesus Christ is only good news to believing sinners. John 3:16 will be the basis of God's greatest condemnation of sinners on the Day of Judgment. To know the love of God but not to respond to it, aggravates to unimaginable proportions the guilt of sinners.

Our Lord responded to unbelievers who heard Him personally and yet did not believe on Him. We read in Matthew 11:20ff:

Then began He (Jesus) to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

So we read of the great condemnation of those who hear of the way of salvation through Christ and yet refuse to believe: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36).

**Third, the nature of the general love of God for sinners is insufficient to save sinners.** All of what we have set forward today about the love of God deals with externals only. All of what we have said has been a description of what God does *toward* man, but unless God does something *in* fallen man and *for him*, it will avail nothing; he will perish in his sin. ***For the general love of God for sinners that makes available salvation for anyone, secures salvation for no one. Only those who are objects of His special, covenant love are the objects of His saving grace.*** Immediately following the pronouncement of judgment on Chorazin and Bethsaida, Jesus uttered this prayer to His Father:

At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. (Matt. 11:25)

## **II. Second, let us consider the special love of God that He extends to all His elect.**

But thankfully, ***God has a special love for His people.*** Paul wrote of this particular love of God for His elect here in Romans 8:31ff.

<sup>31</sup>What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>35</sup>Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?... Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?... <sup>37</sup>No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup>nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

God reveals quite clearly and quite frequently in His Word that He has a love for His people that is unique and special, a special love for them that He does not have for the world. We read that Christ loves His church,

and gave Himself for it. John 13:1 reads, “Then Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.”

In our passage in Romans 8:31ff we read that there is a love of God that is found in Christ Jesus, a love that He has toward His people. God’s love for His people is an everlasting love. It is a redemptive love. It is a love that moves God to draw effectually and save His chosen people. God’s love for His people is of such a nature and to such a degree that He gives all for His own, even His own Son, so as to secure their everlasting well being. Because God loves His people, He saves them from sin and glorifies them before Him.

The love of God for His people is seen in the working of His sovereign power to save His people. We have just seen this in **Romans 8:28**. “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.” But what Paul is emphasizing here is that God in His sovereignty controls all things for the benefit of His people. Because He loved them, He purposed to save them.

**God’s love for His people is from eternity--“For whom He foreknew** (Rom. 8:29a). **The love of God for His people is eternal.** It did not come into being in time. We love God, but it is due to the fact that He first loved us. He first loved us even before the foundation of the world. His love for His people was from eternity. We can say this for the Scriptures tell us that we enjoy the love of God that was in His Son from eternity. We read of this love in John 17:23,24, in which our Lord was speaking to His Father:

I in them, and You in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that **You** sent Me, and **have loved them as You have loved Me**. Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given M; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world

When the Bible sets forth God’s love for us before time, it often does so through the word, “foreknew.” This is what we have in Romans 8:29, “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.” God foreknew, that is “fore loved”, each and all of His chosen people before creation.

**The ones whom the Father foreknew, had been chosen by Him.** We may read of this in numbers of places, but let us look at the opening two verses of 1 Peter:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father**, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. (1 Pet. 1:1,2)

Note how Peter describes them, they were **chosen** of God because they were **foreknown** of God. God knew them, and therefore chose them to be recipients of His grace unto salvation. God the Father’s choice of them was not due to any foreseen merit in them. The Bible nowhere says that God foresaw something good in us or some good thing that we would do and therefore chose us. That would give His people same basis of boasting of being better than others or of deserving His favor. No, God reveals just the opposite. This is stated quite clearly in **1 Corinthians 1:26-31**. Also, this is affirmed in **Ephesians 1:3, 4**,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ, just as He **chose** us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love...

**The ones whom the Father foreknew, and chose, were given to His Son.** Let us look at John 17 to see how this is described for us. The beginning of **John 17** records a prayer that our Lord Jesus gave to His Father shortly before He was crucified. Here we are given insight into God’s purpose for His chosen people. From this passage the following may be said: (1) Believers are a gift from the Father to the Son (John 17:2, 6, 9, 12, 24).

(2) Believers were originally the Father's possession (v.6). In one of the above connections the Saviour stated with reference to the believers that they were a gift from the Father: "they were Yours" (v. 6). Since the entire passage has a redemptive setting and the believers are seen as separate from the world throughout, the reference could not be to the Father's ownership in the sense of creation. This would encompass all mankind and the statement would be without meaning in such a context. The only reasonable explanation of these words is that the believers belonged to the Father by election. This is viewed as an absolute right--so much so that they may be given as specific individuals in the form of gifts from the Father to the Son. Observe that this is *personal* and *individual*, rather than corporate election. This is indicated by the repetition of the personal pronouns. And (3) **believers are the objects of Christ's mercy and ministry.**

In distinction to the world (i.e., the mass of humanity) these believers are set aside for blessing in several aspects: **They are given eternal life (v. 2).** While our Lord achieved supreme power "over all flesh" in His work, He does not grant eternal life to all. Only those previously marked out in the election-gift receive salvation. This is a ministry limited to the chosen ones. There is a discriminatory grace. **They are the objects of His intercession (v. 4).** It will be noticed that He says, "I pray not for the world, but for them which You have given Me." Here is a selected group and a limited ministry. It goes no wider than to those who have been individually and specifically chosen in election. **They are divinely kept (vv. 11, 12).** Worldlings, in the guise of believers, are not kept from falling. Such was Judas, and he is lost. Here again is a limited ministry of the Lord. Only His own are kept from falling. **They will be with Him in glory (v. 24).** Those who have been given to Christ by the Father will behold His glory in heaven. This is guaranteed. The mere professor, however, has no such "blessed hope." This is, once more, a limited ministry of Christ, extended only to the elect. The non-elect will not see His glory, except in judgment.

If you are in Christ, God loves You with the same love that He has for His Son Jesus Christ. If you are outside of Christ, indeed, God has been loving to you, but your rejection of His kind dealings and overtures will condemn you further. May you consider the Savior. God has been so loving to His world that whosoever believes on Him as Lord and Savior shall never perish, but will inherit everlasting life.