



# **EVERLASTING LOVE**

## **Reading: 1 John 4: 7 - 21**

*I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with loving-kindness (Jeremiah 31:3).*

Like so many people, I grew up attending Sunday School and Church services on a regular basis. In fact, apart from Sundays when the family went away on holiday or perhaps I was unwell, for the first formative years of my life I attended both every week. In fact it was almost unthinkable that a Sunday would pass by without my going to Church, usually three times during the day. There was the morning service at 11 o'clock, Sunday School at 2.30 and the evening service at 6 o'clock. Of course, times were very different then. There was little else to distract you from worship, for shops were closed and sports were for Saturdays, not Sundays. It was the normal way of life, and most of the people I knew did exactly the same thing.

The problem was that there was a blurring of the boundaries when it came to the words 'Christian' and 'Citizenship'. People believed that, because the United Kingdom was perceived as a 'Christian Country', then if you were born anywhere in the UK — or even in one of the Colonies — then you were automatically a Christian. Families were recognised as being Christian families, the label being handed down through the generations. The result of this being generations of people who have called themselves Christians have neither truly repented of sin nor made a confession of faith in Jesus Christ.

This blurring — this confusion — has been responsible for keeping so many people away from understanding God as a personal God. There is a sense of recognising that God is all-powerful, and that He has the ultimate responsibility for Creation; that we should offer prayer to Him together with praise; that we should worship Him as our God, yet, at the same time, not be too familiar with Him. In a way we can relate those feelings to the way in which we have been taught to regard the Queen. As the Queen she has a responsibility towards us, and as citizens we have a responsibility towards her. Yet at no time, generally speaking, does it become personal.

The day that I came to know that God was a personal God, that He actually cared what happened to me was a revelation in my life. Suddenly it made sense. Because of the fall of Adam and Eve, I was born a sinner! Not that I had done anything wrong *myself* at the point of birth, but I was an inheritor of their sin, just as Scripture forecast. We know from the Bible that the wages of sin are death, so there I was, a tiny baby, under a sentence of death from the very moment I was born!

Of course this is not what God wants for us, and so He has offered us a way of reconciliation through Jesus Christ. Why has God done this? It's because He is not only just, but also because He loves us, not simply as part of His creation *en bloc*, but He loves each one of us as individuals. He says to everyone, ***"I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with loving-kindness"*** (Jeremiah

31:3). What wonderfully encouraging words for every believer. Of course, God loves everyone, even those who turn their back on Him, even though who actively set themselves against Him, but to really know that love in a deep and fulfilling relationship with Him, we need to return to Him through Jesus Christ. We need to repent of our sinful state. Then we will know through our own experience that God's love is an eternal love. It's filled with unflinching care and mercy. Note that God doesn't simply make the promise that He will love us, but states "I have loved you with an everlasting love." The apostle John states the same wonderful truth. "**We love, because He first loved us**" (1 John 4:19).

How do we know such an awesome fact is true? ***In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins*** (v. 10). There has never been a time when He has not loved you.

Nothing but the love of such a wonderful and caring God could ever accomplish such a fantastic feat. In sending His son to be the '*propitiation for our sins*' He demonstrated His love for us in the most amazing way. His holiness is satisfied, and His wrath is turned away from us because of what Jesus did for us. God's justice becomes fully satisfied because Jesus, His sinless Son, paid our debt in full.

God's wrath is a settled, controlled, holy, antagonism against all sin. The Law says, '*The soul that sins shall die!*' and '*The wages of sin is death.*' But God intervened in His sovereign grace. ***By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him*** (1 John 4:9). ***And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life*** (1 John 5:11-12).

God constantly says to us, ***I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with loving-kindness. I love you and I have demonstrated that love once and forever in the death of My Son on your behalf.***

We never understand God's love for us until we understand this demonstration of His grace. By nature we are dead to the presence of God. Because of sin we're in no condition to understand His love until He reveals Himself to us in Christ. We're unable to see Him and experience the personal nature of His love until, by His grace, the scales are removed from our spiritual eyes. Our heart is dead to any movement of God's grace until the Holy Spirit changes us. Our conversion or new birth is the work of the Spirit. It's a divine operation. Only God is able to do it. True knowledge of the love of God is a divine work.

God says, ***I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness.*** His arms are always outstretched and reaching down to us, and always were, even when we were spiritually dead and unaware of it. It's always a tremendous act of grace when He comes to the confessing, believing, repenting, and trusting sinner.

Jesus said, ***“No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day”*** (John 6:44); and also ***“All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me; and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out”*** (John 6:37).

God always finishes what He begins and our salvation is no exception. His everlasting love will see us through to the end. ***“All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me,”*** That wonderful gift of God's everlasting love gives us the confidence and assurance of spending eternal life with Him in heaven.

Amen

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