

## Divine Love: Does God Love Everyone?

GOD'S love has always played a central role in Reformed theology, but this attribute of his must be properly understood. The statement "God is love" is often explained in rather complex theological terms as a combination of two main ideas. First, the endless life of the triune God is one of mutual affection and honor (Mt 3:17; 17:5; Jn 3:35; 14:31; 16:13-14; 17:1-5,22-26). Second, God made angels and people to glorify their Maker by sharing the joyful give-and-take of this divine life according to their own creaturely mode. But when John asserted that "God is love" (1Jn 4:8), he was thinking primarily of God's love for human beings and specifically of the fact that God through Christ has actually saved us who were formerly lost sinners but who now believe. "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God"—we didn't—"but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1Jn 4:9-10).

As always in the New Testament, "us" as the objects and beneficiaries of redeeming love means "us who believe" (cf. Ro 8:39; 1,1n 4:13). Neither here nor elsewhere does "we" or "us" refer to each individual belonging to the human race. The New Testament teaching on redemption is particularistic throughout, and when "the world" is said to be loved and redeemed (Jn 3:16-17; 2Co 5:19; 1Jn 2:2), the reference is generally to the great number of God's elect scattered worldwide throughout the ungodly human community (cf. Jn 10:16; 11:51-52). This is not to say that God does not express a certain type of merciful, forbearing love toward all of humankind (Mt 5:44-45), but this love is not sufficient to motivate God to provide Jesus as the mediator and atoning sacrifice on their behalf. Never does the Bible speak of God's redemptive love applying to each and every member of the human race who did, does or will ever exist (cf. Ro 1:7).

This sovereign, redemptive love is one facet of the quality that Scripture calls God's goodness (Ps 100:5; Mk 10:18); that is, the glorious kindness and generosity that touches all his creatures (Ps 145:9,15-16) and that ought to lead all sinners to repentance (Ro 2:4). Other aspects of this goodness are the mercy, or compassion or pity, that shows kindness to persons in distress by

rescuing them from trouble (Pss 107; 136), as well as the longsuffering, forbearance and slowness to anger that continue to show kindness toward persons who have persisted in sinning (Ex 34:6; Ps 78:38; Jn 3:10-4:11; Ro 9:22; 2Pe 3:9). The supreme expression of God's goodness is still, however, the amazing grace and inexpressible love that shows kindness by saving sinners who deserve only condemnation—saving them, moreover, at the tremendous cost of Jesus' death on Calvary (Ro 3:22-24; 5:5-8; 8:32-39; Eph 2:1-10; 3:14-19; 5:25-27).

God's faithfulness to his purposes, promises and people is a further aspect of his love as expressed in goodness and praiseworthiness. Humans lie and break their word; God does neither. Even in the worst of times, it can still be said that "his compassions never fail ... Great is your faithfulness" (La 3:22-23; see Ps 36:5; cf. Ps 89, especially vv. 1-2,14,24,33,49). Although God's ways of expressing his faithfulness are sometimes unexpected and bewildering—at times looking to the casual observer, and in the short term, more like unfaithfulness—the final testimony of those who walk with God through life's ups and downs is a resounding declaration that "every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed" (Jos 23:14). God's fidelity, along with the other aspects of his gracious goodness as set forth in his Word, is always solid ground on which to rest our faith and hope.

Excerpted from *The Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible*, Copyright 2003, The Zondervan Corporation, page 2039

Shown here, as authorized by:

<http://www.zondervan.com/Cultures/en-US/Company/Policy/Rights/Internet.htm?QueryStringSite=Zondervan>

As required by Zondervan, this message must be posted:

This *The Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible* can be purchased at: [The Amazon Bookstore](#).