

Talking About Love

Steve McVey

"Why do you speak only about the love of God? I know He loves us all, but there are other important things we need to know about Him too." This was the observation somebody recently made in an email he wrote me. It seemed to this person that maybe my ministry and message somehow lack balance or are incomplete because of my constant emphasis on the loving grace of God.



I understand his concern. There was a time when I would have thought the same thing. At that time, I saw love as an important attribute of God's character that needed to be stressed along with other important characteristics of His nature. There came a time, though, that my understanding of our Father's nature changed.

I now don't see love as one of the attributes of God that stands alongside His mercy, justice, patience, wrath, omniscience, etc. I see love as *the* defining characteristic of His very nature. John wrote, "God is love." To say that our God *is* love is a different matter than simply saying that He loves. Our God may show mercy, justice, patience, wrath, etc. He may possess omniscience and be omnipotent, omnipresent, etc. Those things describe Him and how he behaves, but love is a different category altogether. Love *defines* our Father. It is the essence of His being. It is His divine DNA.

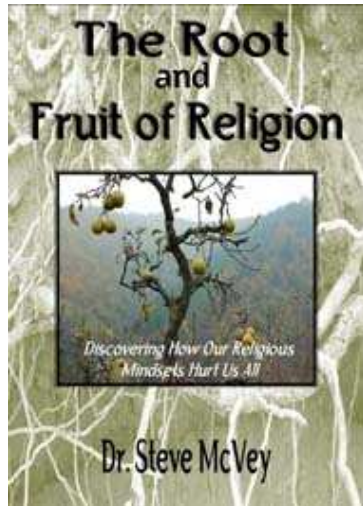
When we understand the reality that God is love, it changes everything. It affects the way we see Him. It affects the way we read our Bibles. It affects the way we see other people and ourselves. It transforms us because that's what love does.

The love of our Father is so different from earthly love that it has a name of its own. It's called *agape*. *Agape* is a kind of love that isn't called forth because of a desirable quality of the its recipient. Instead, it springs forth because of the beauty of the one from whom it flows. *Eros* is a kind of love that sees something physically stimulating in another person. *Storge* sees something comfortable and warm that attracts it. *Phileo* sees a kindred heart that it wants to befriend. *Agape* isn't drawn to somebody because of something in them but because of something in *Himself*.

Once we understand that God *is* Love, we realize that everything we know about Him must be filtered through that lens. Every other characteristic or action of our Father will then be seen as an expression of Love.

What a comforting thought! When the world around us seems to be falling apart, we can know that a *loving* God is sovereign! When our own circumstances seem out of control, we can know that a *loving* God has us under His watchful care! When we don't understand and are troubled, our *loving* God does understand and already has all the details worked out for us.

God doesn't just love you. He *is* Love. Meditate on that reality. Let it grip you and transform your perspective on reality, as you've understood reality until now. Love superintends the universe and also your own life. No wonder the Apostle Paul wrote, "If God be for us, who can stand against us?!" What else is there to talk about except Love because when we talk about Love, we are talking about Him.



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A Bitter Fruit Called Judgmentalism Part 2

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How Important Is Persistence In Praying About A Matter?

by Steve McVey



I used to believe that it increased the likelihood of having my prayers answered if I prayed constantly about the thing that concerned me. I thought the longer I stayed on my knees about it the better off the outcome would be. I don't believe that anymore. God doesn't need me to convince Him to act on my behalf. Jesus once told a story that illustrates the heart of the Father toward us:

Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, saying, "In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.' For a while he was unwilling, but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.'" And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly (Luke 18:1-8).

Is Jesus telling us all that we need to keep praying and praying and praying without giving up on the Father answering our prayer? I think this view misses the point. Jesus is using an unrighteous man as His example in this story. Jesus stresses twice that this judge "did not fear God nor respect man." He wasn't a loving, caring man at all. He was indifferent to the needs of the supplicant and had to be worn down by persistent begging.

The truth Jesus wants us to see is that we are not to think of God that way! In this story Jesus was doing what He did so many other times, and that is to make an argument through contrast. We are missing the point if we think God is like that judge, unconcerned with people's needs and only responding if we badger Him into it. No, Jesus' point is, "If even an unrighteous, uncaring judge can be persuaded to act for you, how much more will the perfectly loving and good God respond to our heartfelt cries!" He isn't telling us that we have to pray tremendous lengths of time to persuade our Father. What He is saying is that anytime and every time you pray, you can have confidence that He hears and will answer. All the time you can pray knowing that He loves you and isn't holding out on you until you prove your sincerity by time and effort in prayer. God isn't a Judge who needs to be persuaded. He is a Father is eager to answer you and to show you His love!

We reverse it in our minds sometimes, and believe that God doesn't care. We think, "If we can just get enough people praying, and can log enough time in prayer, then maybe we can cause God to do something He really isn't interested in doing. If He's not now on our side, maybe we can win Him over through sheer effort and persistence."

But the truth of grace is just the opposite. We don't have to persuade a reluctant, unconcerned God. It's the other way around. God is the seeker. He is the primary lover. God is always the initiator, so in reality the way it works is this: When the Lord gets ready to do something, He often moves the hearts of His people to pray. He moves us to pray, and we might be moved to invite others to join us in prayer. Then they can share in the process and become a part of the answer as well. When we become involved in prayer, God allows us to participate in what He's doing in this world.

Back to the story Jesus told of the unrighteous judge: It's important to note that in the story he told, Jesus had the supplicant appealing to a judge for help. He wanted us to see that our Father isn't like the person depicted in this story. The judge was reluctant to answer, but our Father isn't.

How we view God has everything to do with what expectations (faith) we have when we come to Him in prayer. I've already said that Jesus was using contrast to show the difference between our situation when we ask God for something and the situation of the widow in His story. There can be a difference in our expectation and approach when we come to Him because of the difference in the identities of the one the widow was beseeching and the One we are asking for help.

She was talking to a Judge. You aren't. You are talking to your Father. That difference cannot be overstated. God isn't a Judge who is sitting in heaven with a judicial mindset toward you that causes you to have to appeal to Him as you would ask a human judge to show you mercy and to grant your petition to the court.

Our God's relationship to you isn't judicial. It is relational. He is your Father and He delights in responding to our heartfelt requests. You can approach Him with the full knowledge that He doesn't have to be persuaded to act in your best interest. His role in your life is based on His loving character. That fact gives you reason to know that you don't have to beg Him. You don't have to get enough people to convince Him the way somebody might show up in court with a petition signed by a multitude of people to convince the judge to rule in their behalf. Your Father is already on your side and is eager to bless you in every way. The story of the widow and the judge doesn't teach the lesson many of us have been told. In fact, it teaches just the opposite.
