



What Makes God Great—The Third Trait

Years ago when I graduated from college, more than two thousand miles from my hometown, I had one family member in attendance. It was my mom and to most, that would not be unusual. In my case, it was stunning. Although she was less than fifty, my mom was frail and moved about as if she was nearly a hundred years old. My mom's body was wrecked by years of chemotherapy and yet she alone, out of all my family members got on a plane and came across more than half the country to be at my graduation. She never complained, never mentioned what a sacrifice it was to be there. Why did my mom come to my graduation when she was in such pain and so weakened by cancer? It was because she loved me. Love is not blind! It resolute!

When you think of God, what term comes to mind? Is it strong, or righteous, or omnipotent, or eternal? John, the Apostle who was apparently closest to Jesus of all of them and perhaps knew God more than anyone, tells us "God is love." **And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.** (1 John 4:16 NIV) Love of course is a multi-directional term. It can mean everything from the feeling many have holding a newborn to what they experience with who they are having an affair or what they think of pizza. Let me ask you. Is love who you are? Is love what you do for others? Is love determined by pre-existing conditions? Is love a force or a feeling? Can love be measured or quantified? Why don't you take a short quiz to see what impact love is having on you at this moment. All of these will be based on a scale of one to ten with one meaning very little or almost not at all and ten being extremely so, at the highest levels. 1. How loved do you feel by God? 2. How loved do you feel by those you love? 3. How loved do you feel by those who have treated you badly? 4. How well do those you love know they are loved by you? 5. How much love do you show to God? 6. How much love do you show to enemies? 7. How much love do you show to friends? 8; How important is it for you to love others? 9. How important is it for you to be loved by others? 10. How much love do you show towards someone who hurts you?

Here is the most famous verse in the Bible. **For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.** (John 3: 16.NIV) What makes it so memorable is that it has the most fundamental terms in the Christian language. God, love, Son, believe, eternal life. The entire Bible can be adequately summarized using those five terms. Each have had libraries written about them. Let's just take two of the five and add one more. God love world. The Greek term translated "world" is kosmos and can be taken in a wide range of ways. It can be speaking of the universe as a physical entity; all the stars and sky and everything in them. Kosmos can also refer to that which is opposed to God and His Kingdom. It is the collection of people who want God to fail or not exist at all. Kosmos can mean the planet upon which we live although that is usually the Greek term "gais". A fourth way it is used and that is what it means in John 3: 16 is all the people of the earth. Humanity as a whole.

We asked the question, "Is love who you are?" The Bible tells us that is precisely so with God. God is love. Love defines Him, identifies Him; it is how He is comprised. Just as Jesus said, God is Spirit, in the same way, He is love. So when John tells us "God so loved the world", it cannot come as a surprise as it is what He is and everything that flows from Him is comprised of love. Now, let us consider who God loves when it says He "loves the world." It is every sinner who has ever lived. It is Cain who killed Abel ruthlessly. It is the Assyrians who raped, butchered, and made slaves of those they conquered. It is Amnon who raped his sister and left her a psychological wreck the rest of her life. It is David who committed adultery and had the husband of the man he slept with killed. It is Delilah who tricked Samson, who was in love with her, into

giving away the secret to his great strength resulting in the Philistines capturing him, gouging out his eyes and making him a slave. If you consider the track record of God, then you would have to say the answer is “no” to the question, “Is love determined by pre-existing conditions?”

Let’s just take a quick look at the most perfect description of love found anywhere in literature. The Apostle Paul defines love this way. **Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.** (1 Corinthians 13: 4-6 NIV) We need to be clear on this. Love is what God is. So what this says about love is describing God perfectly. Is love determined by pre-existing conditions? According to the Bible, it isn’t. Love is in the moment without regard for what has gone on in the past. Love is not decided by what has been done or how someone has acted. It stands alone without regard for what might be or what has been. This explains why God could die to save the worst of sinners and not blink. Love is fixed on who one is, not on what one has done. Who is worthy to be loved by God? Keep in mind the words of the Bible. **...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,** (Romans 3: 23 NIV) That is the entire world; all of us who God so loved that He gave His Son to die to bring salvation.

Consider this one example of how the love of God plays out in us. A rather stunning revelation the Bible makes is that for all the good of Mary and how marvelous it was she was chosen by God to as a virgin bear the child fathered by the Holy Spirit; she turned on Jesus. She wasn’t trying to be intentionally evil but she was evil nonetheless, or to put it another way, she sinned and fell short of the glory of God. One time, when Jesus was teaching a group of people, Mary came with her other family members, intending to take Jesus away. **Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."...Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."** (Mark 3: 20-21, 31-32 NIV) We can be certain Jesus already knew what His mother thought of Him. Something that monumental in a relationship cannot be hidden for long. This belief of Mary that Jesus was mentally unstable could only have grown stronger as Jesus came into Jerusalem and was arrested by the Jewish authorities and then was crucified by the Romans. She stood there as Jesus hung on the cross watching Him die. One can only wonder what she thought of His mental state then. But Jesus, not caring what she considered Him, unfazed by her complete misunderstanding of who He was and rejection of the road He had taken, made the love He still had for her known. He pulled His most trusted disciple to Him and from the cross commissioned him to care for His mother Mary. **When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.** (John 19: 26-27 NIV)

Perhaps you may say, “Anyone has that sort of love, the desire to take care of His mother. That isn’t special.” I want you to understand what Jesus saw in Mary and in all of us of the world who have sinned and rejected God time and again. God sees what is possible. We can be made perfectly sinless, holy in every way. He knows He can remake us into people full of love and completely good. Rather than dumping us in the trash heap and giving up on us, discarding us as useless and worthless, God in His love suffered the Cross to take out of us our Sin and make us perfect. God refuses to give up on us no matter how badly we may act or how hopeless our sinful state may seem. God does not weigh you in the balance to see if you are good enough for Him. He does not put you through a million different lifetimes until you match up to God’s standard for you. You are not a toy for God to manipulate and torment. You are the one He loves, and He died on the Cross to transform you into a perfect soul, able to love completely, act kindly and be without any sort of impurity. God is love and He died to make it possible for you to love Him back and all those He has put into your life.