

Loving as God Loves

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. **For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world;** but that the world through him **might be saved.**” (Jhn 3:16-17). God didn’t send His Son into this world to condemn us by telling us just how rotten we really are! Rather, because He loves us so much, He sent His Son into this world so that we could be saved.

Abraham got just a taste of God’s unfathomable love when he was told to do the unthinkable—sacrifice his own son whom he loved dearly, “Take now **thy son**, thine only *son* Isaac, **whom thou lovest**, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and **offer him there**” (Gen 22:2). Of course it was only a test in which he was stopped short of doing, but he didn’t know that at the time. And Isaac, like a harmless lamb, was innocent of anything but simply yielded to his father. For God to require this sacrifice from Abraham, God would require no less from Himself, “My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering” (Gen 22:8). Even knowing how horribly His dearly beloved Son would suffer—being mocked, shamed, spat upon, flogged, crucified—He loved us so much to subject Him to it all.

“For scarcely for **a righteous man** will one die: yet peradventure for **a good man** some would even dare to die. But **God commendeth his love toward us**, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us ... **when we were enemies**, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Rom 5:7-8,10). From a human perspective; few would die for a righteous man, and even fewer would die for a good man, but how many would die for their enemy? Yet God did just that. He commended or proved His love by sending His Son to die for His enemies!

“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, **not that we loved God, but that he loved us**, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, **if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.**” (1Jo 4:9-11). God loved us even though we didn’t love Him. We now love Him only because He first loved us, “We love him, because he first loved us” (1Jo 4:19). If He hadn’t loved us while we were His enemies, we never would have loved Him. Therefore, as He so loved us, we must also love others—we must love our enemies.

Jesus taught, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and **hate thine enemy**. 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 ye may be the children of your Father** which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” (Mat 5:43-45). God loves His enemies every day by sending sunlight and rain to maintain the ecosystem, sustaining all life. And His children must do likewise—do good to the unloving and even to the hating.

John used Abel and Cain as examples of a child of God and a child of the devil, **“In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil:** whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that **loveth not his brother**. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. **Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one**, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because **his own works [actions] were evil, and his brother’s righteous.**” (1Jo 3:10-12). Although Cain was Abel’s enemy, Abel loved Cain. God’s children and the devil’s children are known by their actions—by either loving or not loving their enemies.

Many teach that God had respect to Abel’s offering because it was a blood sacrifice, “And Abel, he also brought of **the firstlings of his flock** and of **the fat thereof**” (Gen 4:4). But that’s not the case. It was Abel *himself* that God respected, and Cain *himself* that He didn’t, **“And the LORD had respect unto Abel** and to his offering: **But unto Cain** and to his offering **he had not respect**” (v. 5). Had Cain’s actions been righteous as Abel’s, he also would have been accepted, “If thou **doest well**, shalt thou not be accepted?” (v. 7). God doesn’t regard gifts from those He doesn’t regard. We must first be accepted before our gifts will be.

Christ taught the intent of “Thou shalt not kill” (Mat 5:21), “Therefore if thou **bring thy gift to the altar**, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; **first be reconciled to thy brother**, and then come and **offer thy gift**” (Mat 5:23-24). We’re breaking “Thou shalt not kill” when we’re not doing all we can to be at peace with others including our enemies, “If it be possible, **as much as lieth in you**, live peaceably with all men ... if **thine enemy** hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink” (Rom 12:18,20). Like God, God’s children love their enemies by doing good to them.