

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 89 – THE LOVE OF THE FATHER

We have reached that point in the narrative where God has achieved His goal of creating “man in His image” and as a consequence, God and man can dwell face to face in the New Jerusalem.

- ◆ God through His work has created for Himself a holy people within whom he can now come and dwell (Revelation 21:3).
- ◆ We have been looking at what insights we can discern from scripture on what life will be like in heaven.
- ◆ I have purposely left the major benefit of life in heaven to the last and that is, we will come to know the God who is the Trinity in not only His majestic glory, but also in a very personal way.
- ◆ Hopefully through this series we have come to regard the God we Christians worship in a totally new light.
- ◆ Rather than being regarded as a remote abstract concept described with terms such as “almighty, omnipotent, omniscience, infinite, transcendent, etc., we have also come to regard Him as a loving parent who wants an intimate relationship with all His children, in other words, a personal God who cherishes relationship with others.
- ◆ Although these abstract terms are accurate ways of describing God, to place undue emphasis on them to the detriment of the personal God we have learned about is to do great harm to our understanding of the true nature of God.

One of the objectives of this series has been to address the misconceptions (usually negative) surrounding God's character and nature, and to highlight the vast love God has towards His creation and the ends to which He has gone to reach this point where God and humanity now live side by side in eternity.

- ◆ In contrast to the hierarchical concept of God that has developed in western Christianity usually depicted by a triangle, John of Damascus, a Greek theologian (7th century) pictured the Trinity as three dancers holding hands dancing around together in joyful freedom.
- ◆ He coined the word, *perichoresis*, *peri* (as in perimeter) means “around,” and *choresis* literally means, “dancing.”
- ◆ Rather than thinking of the Trinity in an hierarchical and individualistic sense, this description invites us to think of a community of persons in complete unity who love each other and live together in perfect harmony.
- ◆ This is the existence and inner life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- ◆ Of course this is difficult for us to fathom because of our four-dimensional limitations. However we get an insight into this life from Jesus' statement in John 10.
- ◆ ***John 10:38 “But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.”***
- ◆ John of Damascus' concept of *perichoresis* gives us a completely different perception of the inner life of the Godhead than the Western hierarchical model.
- ◆ Gone is the person in isolation, gone is the hierarchical structure of first, second and third in importance, gone is the competition and rivalry of who is in charge, gone is the conflict over opposing ideas.
- ◆ Unfortunately, some of these negative characteristics have made their way into our current church structures.
- ◆ Instead, with *perichoresis*, we get a picture of a community of equals living and sharing with one another in self-giving love.
- ◆ It is into this divine circle of love that humanity has been drawn through the combined efforts of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- ◆ No longer is it a society that places it's emphasis on “looking after number one,” or of dominating others, but of all working together in the best interests of all.
- ◆ And it is now humanity's privilege to get to know this God in a personal and intimate way in all His manifest glory, not only as the God who is creator, almighty, omnipotent, full of wisdom and knowledge, but also the God who is loving, graceful, merciful and kind and calls Himself “our Father.”
- ◆ And we can ask the question, why would God choose this title to describe Himself unless He planned to do something with it?
- ◆ And of course the answer is, the title “Father” implies bringing sons and daughters into existence.
- ◆ And that one title of “Father” completely changes the way we regard God because it changes our emphasis from this detached, powerful God off somewhere, to a personal, relational God who is very much involved in each of our lives.

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- ◆ **Ephesians 1:5 (NLT) His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave him great pleasure.**
- ◆ This is the reason you and I and every other human being has been brought into existence – to be adopted into the Father's family.
- ◆ **Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NLT) He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.**
- ◆ We were created with a yearning in our hearts – a yearning that will never be satisfied this side of eternity, a yearning that keeps drawing us towards a relationship with our God.
- ◆ Look what Jesus said on the eve of the conclusion of His mission.
- ◆ Notice the inclusive, relational terminology that Jesus uses to describe the relationship the godhead wants to share with His children.
- ◆ **John 17:20-26** ²⁰ *“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,* ²¹ *that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.* ²² *I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—* ²³ *I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.* ²⁴ *“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.* ²⁵ *“Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me.* ²⁶ *I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”*
- ◆ It can't be any clearer than that – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit want to take us by the hand and include us in their great dance of eternity.
- ◆ Father, Son and Holy Spirit will share their combined divine attributes of love and relationship with their children.
- ◆ This will be the culmination of God's grand purpose of drawing humanity back into relationship with Him.
- ◆ It was a process. He first dwelled among Israel in the tabernacle; He drew closer when God Emmanuel walked among us; He came and dwelt in us via the Holy Spirit; but now we can interact with Him face to face in all His majestic glory.
- ◆ **1 Corinthians 13:12 For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.**

It is testimony to God's great love for humanity that we have arrived at this point.

- ◆ Each person of the godhead has contributed His own unique part to the process of redemption.
- ◆ The Father initiated the process of salvation, the Son has effected it, and the Holy Spirit applies it to humanity.
- ◆ So to finish this series, let's summarise these roles according to the way they are described in the benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14.
- ◆ **2 Corinthians 13:14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.**
- ◆ Although Paul singles out the primary role each plays in the process of salvation, we need to be aware the other two persons are also involved because God is also “One.”

We will start with the Father from whom the love of God flows as He initiates the process.

- ◆ Earlier we spoke about how God the Father is the source or fountain of love.
- ◆ **1 John 4:7-8 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.**
- ◆ The source and origin of love is God.
- ◆ And astoundingly, way back before time existed, this God whose very nature of love is so generous and overflowing, decided to lavish the very existence that infuses the Trinity on others.
- ◆ By looking at the process of salvation that has brought God and humanity face to face, we can identify eight characteristics that exemplify the love the Father has showered on humanity.
- ◆ 1) The first thing we can say about the love of God is He wants to share this particular divine virtue with others.
- ◆ His whole purpose in creating the cosmos is precisely for this reason, to share His divine love with others.

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- ◆ Our questions about our existence go back to this one factor, to create a holy community sharing the love of God.
- ◆ **1 John 3:1 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!**
- ◆ 2) His desire is to share His love with all, not just a chosen few, but all peoples. In other words, His love does not discriminate.
- ◆ **1 Timothy 2:3-4 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.**
- ◆ Jesus through His life and death has implicated all in this process, and God will make sure all get the opportunity to respond to the love and grace of God.
- ◆ 3) Through the whole sordid process, God has remained faithful to His rebellious children. Such is His love.
- ◆ He didn't abandon them despite their constant rejection of Him, not Adam and Eve, not Israel, not Peter, not even the wicked as we saw when we looked at the subject of the judgment and hell.
- ◆ He will pursue us even to the gates of hell; such is His desire to share what He has with us.
- ◆ **Luke 19:10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.**
- ◆ 4) He took the initiative in going after the lost sheep.
- ◆ He doesn't say, "Okay, first, repent of your sins, believe in me, then I will come after you!"
- ◆ **Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**
- ◆ He doesn't wait around for us to clean up our lives but goes after us despite our sinfulness (Luke 19:10).
- ◆ 5) His love is unconditional.
- ◆ He doesn't say, "If you love me, then I will love you!" Or, I will love you when you become God-fearing, law-abiding respectable citizens.
- ◆ **Romans 8:38-39 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**
- ◆ 6) God's love involves a personal cost.
- ◆ In order to share His love with humanity, God the Father had to suffer the loss of Himself through His one and only Son.
- ◆ **John 3:16 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.**
- ◆ God didn't display His love from the comfort of heaven, but got down and dirty by joining us in our fallen state.
- ◆ 7) God's love is a reconciling love.
- ◆ God's motive in all His dealing with us is to bring about reconciliation, even with those who oppose Him.
- ◆ His command to love our enemies is one of the most difficult challenges we Christians face.
- ◆ We want revenge, we want to respond to what we perceive as injustice, and we want retribution, yet God wants to redeem even His enemies.
- ◆ **2 Corinthians 5:19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.**
- ◆ 8) Finally, God's love is a renewing love.
- ◆ God's love is more than just forgiving and accepting us. His purpose is not just to save us, but also to conform us to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29).
- ◆ He doesn't expect us to do this on our own strength, but instead gives us His Holy Spirit who regenerates us and sets about empowering us to become different people, people who recognise their limitations and allow the Holy Spirit to mould and shape them into God's holy people.
- ◆ So it is the love of the Father that has initiated this whole process of creating a holy people within whom He can come and dwell.
- ◆ Next we turn our attention to the roles the Son and the Holy Spirit play in the redemption process.