

The Love of God

Carl H. Stevens Jr. is pastor of Greater Grace Church located in Baltimore, Maryland. Pastor Stevens is also chancellor of Maryland Bible College & Seminary and host of the international Christian radio program "The Grace Hour." This booklet was created from messages preached by Pastor Stevens.

Pastor Stevens can be seen weekly on cable television stations throughout the United States. Call us for information regarding programming in your area.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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THE LOVE OF GOD
by Frederick M. Lehman

*The Love of God is greater far
than any tongue or pen can tell.
It goes beyond the highest star
and reaches to the lowest hell.
The guilty pair, bowed down with care,
God sent His Son to win;
The erring child He reconciled
and pardoned from his sin.*

*Could we with ink the ocean fill,
and were the skies of parchment made;
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
and every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above
would drain the ocean dry,
Nor could the scroll contain the whole
though stretched from sky to sky.*

*Oh Love of God! How rich and pure,
How measureless and strong!
It shall forever more endure the saints' and angels' song.*

INTRODUCTION

The love of God is one of the most misunderstood subjects in the Church today. Even without meaning to, many pulpits limit God's love. They may preach on John 14:15, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." Properly understood, however, the emphasis in that verse is not on us keeping the commandments. It is in receiving the power of love that the commandments are kept. In other words, this love is not something we *do*; it is something we *receive*.

Psalm 53:2 says that "God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God." God wants us to understand His love. He wants us to understand that He is love, and that before He ever created anyone to love, He was love for all of eternity.

We pray that you will meditate on these verses so the doctrine of God's love will be planted firmly in your heart. His desire for every

one of us is to know the length, the depth, the breadth, and the height of love in an objective communion that can freely pour out unconditional love to those who can't yet respond. One day, we will rejoice with each saint—every one of us a trophy of the grace that triumphed over hell, each one a miracle of redemption—because of our great God who is love.

Chapter One

GOD'S LOVE MADE PERFECT

“Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him because he first loved us” (1 John 4:17-19).

Consider the words, “Herein is our love made perfect.” Multitudes of Christians today lack an understanding of how to make love perfect. It is not intentional, but if only we could grasp how this love is made perfect in us then we would enter into a brand-new understanding of spiritual life.

The Word of God in 1 John 4 says that there is no *fear*—no torment—in love, and that perfect love casts out fear. This is vital because according to Genesis 3:10, the first emotional result of Adam and Eve’s failure was fear. Fear was the

first sin after unbelief. Job confessed, “For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me” (Job 3:25).

Because of the fear of death, people live their entire lives in subjection to some kind of bondage (see Hebrews 2:15). If you feel insecure when you hear the news that you have cancer or that you will have to file for bankruptcy, it is because you are filled with a deep-rooted subjective fear. But there is something that casts out all fear: *perfect love*. How does it work? When I am filled with love, which is the subjective nature of God, that love will drive out subjective fear. “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us...” (1 John 4:10a).

The Nature of God’s Subjective Love

“God is love” (1 John 4:8). Verse nine goes on to say, “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.”

First, God *is* love. Then, that love was manifested to the world through the Son. But in many cases, that is as far as love ever goes in the Christian’s experience. “God is love” means that

God “is” love before He ever created angels, the earth, or the human race. In Revelation 1:8, Jesus Christ says, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending...which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.”

Next, God’s love is *subjective*, a love that depends completely on the subject (in this case, God) and never on the object (man). Subjective love is unconditional. Subjective love only belongs to God. God is love, but I am not love. Only to the degree that I receive love from God do I actually have love. Only as I receive love can I *be* love. I must have this love shed abroad in my heart by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5).

What did subjective love do? It manifested itself on the Cross in the unlimited atonement to pay for the sins of the world (see 1 John 2:2; 2 Corinthians 5:19). This love is unconditional. Now, whosoever will may come to God and be received of Him, and as many as receive Jesus Christ, receive power to become the sons of God (John 1:12).

Objective Love

Objective love—in contrast with subjective love—depends upon the response of the object to the subject who is expressing the love. It is

based on the value that has been placed on the object, or something attractive in the object. Un-saved people can have measures of objective love toward one another. For example, a respectable woman could marry an honest man and they could appreciate the moral values in each other. That would be objective love, but it is not necessarily spiritual because it is based upon an education in human goodness.

The moment we were saved, we received a robe of imputed righteousness—the righteousness of a holy God placed on our account, with no works on our part (Isaiah 61:10). Positionally, we were declared righteous (Romans 3:25). But at that point, the only way God could love us objectively was in our position in the Finished Work. This is not an experiential love where He initiates and we respond. It is an unconditional love that extends from the Subject because He is love; but as yet, there was nothing of value in us as the objects of His love. His love was for us, and toward us, but it was subjective. There is no real response on our part until we begin to have a hunger and thirst for the Word of God. But as we receive the Word of God, we are filled with *imparted* righteousness (Matthew 5:6), which gives us objective value.

Objective love is conditional, just as rewards are conditional. Therefore, we must first develop a capacity to understand how much God loves us. He will always love us, and we will always be the objects of His love for salvation, but His all-encompassing Alpha-Omega love must be imparted. When it is not imparted, then we do not receive the many benefits that are ours in Christ. We may have the benefits of positional truth, and we may know that we have eternal life (1 John 5:13), but we do not yet have everything that belongs to us in our experience.

God's Perfect Hatred toward Esau

“Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows” (Psalm 45:7).

“Do not I hate them, oh LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them my enemies” (Psalm 139:21-22).

For perfect love to be perfect there must also be perfect hatred. Perfect hatred has nothing to do with bitterness, vindictiveness, anger, retaliation, or mental negativity.

Christians who do not understand the dif-

ference between subjective and objective love do not understand God's declaration in Romans 9:13: "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (see Malachi 1:2-3). The truth is that God meant exactly what He said. It was not an "anthropopathic" statement, where the Holy Spirit ascribes human emotions to God because of our limited understanding of the reality of who He is.

There was no objective value in Esau. Though Jacob was the supplanter, he desired to have a greater blessing from God. Esau, on the other hand, was consumed with temporal blessings for his flesh, and his heart was not after God. Subjectively, the Lord loved Esau no less than He loved Jacob. That was an unconditional love that will never change. But objectively, God could not manifest His love toward Esau.

Because objective love is conditional, its manifestation changes depending on the response of the object to the subject. For example, when a saved loved one dies, the dynamic interaction of objective love is gone because the object of my love can no longer respond to me. But if I have entered into an objective love relationship with God by putting Him first and responding to His promises, then I will experience the fragrance of memories in a subjective attitude of

love for the one who died. Rather than being devastated by the loss, though I will miss our fellowship, I will thank God that my loved one is in heaven, rejoicing in a perfect soul body.

Before Lucifer “the son of the morning” fell, God had objective love for him. As the angel closest to the throne of God, Lucifer was filled with doctrine, joy, and peace, and he had objective love. But when iniquity was found in his heart and he accused the character of God’s love toward the angels, Lucifer entered into emotional rebellion, was cast down from heaven, and took one third of the angels with him (Revelation 12:4-9). When that happened, objective love stopped. No longer did God love him as an object because he had become God’s enemy, rejecting God’s authority.

God does not have love for the devil, but that doesn’t change the fact that God is love; He will never be anything *but* love. But perfect love enters into perfect hatred, and God sends people to hell because they reject His Son Jesus Christ who is the only basis for objective value to be found in a man.

That is why we don’t like certain people. It is not because of bitterness or anything to do with “self.” It is only because they have no value

in terms of their character with God. Second Corinthians 6:14*b* says, “What fellowship hath light with darkness?” What agreement is between Christ and Belial, the personification of wickedness? We have no fellowship with unbelievers because there is no basis for objective love, even though the subjective love of God is always toward them and will never change.

Blessed beyond Others

As we begin to respond to God’s subjective love toward us, we begin to love ourselves. We love who God has made us to be in Christ. Then we have the power to respond to the first commandment: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength” (Mark 12:30). This brings us into a special relationship with God—an exchange of objective love.

“I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me” (Proverbs 8:17). This verse is speaking about objective love, which is based on a response from the object and flows back to the subject. As a result of this communion through the Holy Spirit, the love of God is shed abroad and poured out, as already

stated (Romans 5:5).

“If a man love me, he will keep my words [doctrine]: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23). This means that when we begin to respond to God’s love by receiving His words, the Trinity will love us in a special way and make Their habitation in us.

According to Deuteronomy 10:12-15 God is saying, “If you love Me, I will love you beyond all other people.” Please understand that this doesn’t happen because of works. It doesn’t happen because all of a sudden we decide we are going to be good and do better. Psalm 116:13 says that we receive the cup of salvation. The “cup” speaks of our capacity for life. No matter how bad we have been or where we are in our walk with God, we must receive grace. Remember, our spirituality is not in what we do, but in receiving something we don’t deserve: *grace*.

Chapter Two

SPECIAL MERCIES: HOW TO HAVE MORE OF GOD

The secret to our spiritual life is this: We put ourselves in a position where we will be blessed by God more than other Christians on the earth. It will happen, unless God is using us in a trial to glorify Himself in the angelic contest. But I love to put myself in a place where I am loved by God with objective love.

“Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy *with them that love him* and keep his commandments” (Deuteronomy 7:9). God is saying, “If you learn how to receive My grace and the filling of My Spirit, using rebound when you fail, then I will share with you an unusual portion of love.” We receive special mercies that others do not, all because we keep on receiving the manifestation of His nature. We get more love back than others because we are using our

love to love God and people. This is why James 4:6 says that God gives greater grace to the humble. He gives more grace, more love, more mercy, more forgiveness, and more patience.

If we will be still before God and let His righteousness produce quietness and strength, and if God becomes the portion of our lives (Psalm 73:26; Lamentations 3:24), then God has to love us more than other Christians. His love does not change toward others, because that is who He is: God is love. Yet, the manifestation of His love changes. That is why He says, “I love them that love me.”

And that is not all. He will forgive us more than He forgives others when they fail. “Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven” (Luke 6:37). This is speaking about experiential, *objective forgiveness*. God has already forgiven all believers positionally, yet, if we will not forgive others, then we will not experience forgiveness in our fellowship with God.

But when we live in a relationship of objective love with God, expressing that same love to others who fail, then God’s love intensifies in its manifestation toward us and we receive more forgiveness than others. God’s love is still unchanging, but for us—as objects of His love, now

that we have opened up to receive it—more of God’s love flows in and through us.

Respond to God’s Gift of Grace

In Deuteronomy 10:12, God requires us to love Him. But what happens to a believer who never enters into a response of love toward God as the object? The answer lies in 1 Corinthians 16:22: “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be *Anathema Maranatha*.” That means, let him be accursed or disciplined by God until the Rapture, or until God takes that believer home early by the sin unto physical death. This is not an Old Testament verse; it’s a New Testament epistle!

Loving God is crucial. Do not confuse the reason for chastisement with the issue of works or performance. Chastisement to this degree is purely a result of a believer neither responding to the gift of God’s grace nor receiving His love through the Spirit. We are not to receive His grace in vain (2 Corinthians 6:1); we are not to fail grace (Hebrews 12:15); and we are not to fall from grace by going back into works (Galatians 5:4). The only way we can abide in grace is by abiding in His objective love and communing through the Holy Spirit.

In Deuteronomy 11:22-23, God says that if we will love Him, walk in His ways, and cleave to Him, He will drive out our enemies. Then in verse 24, He says, "Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours." Jesus Christ is our Head, and He has put all things under our feet (Ephesians 1:22). God is saying, "If you learn to love me objectively through faith and the filling of My Spirit, then you will tread on all the negative things that have affected your life in the past."

We can have victory. It is not by works; it is not by trying to change. Victory is in receiving a change from God through His gift of grace.

Loving Others As the Object

So many Christian marriages are filled with corruption, confusion, and negativity. Because of familiarity and a misunderstanding of God's subjective love, many couples lack true objective love toward each other. Objective love toward people must first be based on my response to God as the subject who loves me unconditionally. When I am filled with the subjective love of God, then I can have a positive attitude toward the potential of the object, whether it be my wife, another believer, the unsaved, or even my

enemies.

For example, I can lay down my life for my wife as the object of my love (1 John 3:16) and give her the manifestation of subjective love that is in me. As my love for her is imparted, it goes inside of her, builds her up, and gives her more value. This is what it means to grow in grace and knowledge and to decrease as Christ increases (2 Peter 3:18; John 3:30).

Whenever a person as the object is responsive, subjective love will be poured into him until the well springs up and the river flows out (John 4:14; 7:38-39), then righteousness is revealed from faith to faith (Romans 1:17).

Loving My Enemies

I must realize that the same Bible that tells me to love my enemies also tells me to mark them and avoid them that cause divisions (see Romans 16:17-18). Because I am filled with the Spirit, I can have an attitude of love toward my enemies that is free from mental attitude sin. I hold nothing against them personally. I don't internalize anything they have done to me; yet, I cannot fellowship with them if there is no spirituality, no value in them as objects. If they would let me minister to them, I would. My love

is available to forgive and to help them the moment they respond. In the meantime, I remain filled with subjective love toward them, but I can't express it outwardly.

The reason God takes some Christians home early is that they refuse to respond to continual initiations of love. That is also why people are in hell. The unsaved only go to hell because, as objects, they never accepted redemption, therefore they have no eternal value.

The Wrong Kind of Subjectivity and Objectivity

Apart from God's subjective love, man's subjective nature can be very destructive. Man's subjectivity is based on his evaluations of sight and rationalization in the flesh. As a result, he has the wrong kind of objectivity. For example, much counseling is done where the counselor tries to evaluate the nature of the object who is being counseled. This evaluation is not valid because the counselor does not know the heart of the object. The natural man can only make his evaluation based on what he sees and what he hears.

A person may look at a woman by sight and determine that she is an emotional wreck. What

he doesn't know is that she has never been loved properly during her life, yet she is being evaluated as an object based on what she *appears* to be because of her behavior, but without seeing her potential. Imagine the difference if her potential were understood and she was evaluated through a divine approach in the Finished Work of Jesus Christ.

It is very interesting that the Lord Jesus Christ in His humanity had "quick understanding in the fear of the LORD" (Isaiah 11:3). The Word goes on to say that He never judged after the sight of His eyes, nor reprov'd after the hearing of His ears. John 8:1-12 is a good illustration of this. The Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman who was caught in the very act of adultery. In their natural subjectivity, the Pharisees judged this woman based on the Mosaic Law, therefore their objective evaluation fell far short of mercy and grace. But after He caused the religious crowd to depart through the conviction of their own consciences, Jesus said to the woman, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:11). Though she was taken in the act of adultery, Jesus saw her as the object of a finished work, not as a future adulteress. God saw her potential in grace.

Chapter Three

CHANGED BY RECEIVING GOD'S GRACE

“Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith *virtue*...” (2 Peter 1:2-5a).

A believer can be the weakest person in the world and still have virtue because of what he is receiving. Virtue is the integrity of receiving God's grace. It is the integrity of receiving something for nothing, something that I don't deserve, as a gift from God because of love. Virtue is hav-

ing integrity to receive the things that make me like God on the inside (see 2 Peter 1:5-7). That is why 2 Peter 1:8 says, “*If these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

God has never told us that we should change. The integrity of receiving grace changes us! We are changed when we recognize our need and receive the grace of God. There is not a verse in the Bible where God says to “change.” Instead we find 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty [to be changed]. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, *are changed* into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:17b-18).

More Christians today are trying to change and “give it up.” But this is impossible, based on Romans 7:21: “When I would do good, evil is present with me.” Even though we cannot change, we can *be* changed. And if we need to rebound seven times a day for the same thing, then we will do it until the victory finally comes—and it comes by receiving. We keep on receiving until the words of life and the words of grace penetrate the conscience, where the

norms and standards for right and wrong are established in my soul. The Holy Spirit can then lift up these godly standards within when the enemy comes against us like a flood (Isaiah 59:19b).

The prophet Jeremiah said, “Turn thou me, and I shall be turned... after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed...” (Jeremiah 31:18b-19a). The whole issue is my attitude toward believing, receiving, and having God’s love. Jesus said in John 6:29 that “the work of God is to believe on Him whom the Father hath sent.” Believing and receiving is what changes us. I am not love, but I can receive love. I am not gracious, but I can receive grace. I am not merciful, but I can receive mercy. And if I keep receiving God’s attributes abundantly, they will flow out as a river.

Many Christians do not understand that they can never change themselves. We say in our frustration, “If He is going to change me, then why doesn’t He just do it?” Yet we fail to understand that change will only come as we continue to receive something from God. We must keep on receiving until we enter into faith rest. And what is our faith resting in but God’s subjective, unconditional love for us (Zephaniah 3:17).

I Shall Arise

Victory is ours through Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57). It is not by works; it doesn't come by trying to change. Victory comes by receiving a change from God through His gift of grace.

“Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness” (Micah 7:8-9).

When this was written, the prophet Micah had fallen into sin. He was struggling. He was hurting. But he knew Bible doctrine. His enemies were mocking him because he was down, yet Micah said, “Don't rejoice over me when I fall. I will arise, and *you* will be ashamed.” Micah didn't deny that he had sinned. At the same time, he knew the Lord was right there with him pleading his case, ever living to make intercession for him (see Hebrews 9:24; 7:25). Therefore, he could say, “I will arise.” What a beautiful attitude to have in the midst of failure!

What was the premise for Micah's change?

He understood God's subjective love. He knew this love was unconditional. Micah understood that God's subjective love had not changed one iota toward him when he was down. Jesus was with him and would never leave or forsake him.

The whole time Micah was down, the Lord was down there with him, just waiting to be gracious to him—waiting for Micah to let God change him. “Therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him” (Isaiah 30:18).

In Battle, Confess the Victory

When you go through a period of time in your lives when you are extremely weak, then confess, “I will arise.” Don't confess that Satan has won the battle. The devil has been defeated. He may have won a round, but he can't win the fight because your life belongs to God.

When you're falling and failing, don't accept defeat. Don't confess your frailty, your weakness, or your feelings to those around you. Make your confession to God because He is *waiting* to be gracious to you. He is not waiting to give you grace *after* you have changed; He gives you

grace to *be* changed!

Imagine a Christian failing, *not* because of wrong choices but because he did not freely receive the grace that would keep him from wrong decisions. If a person comes to me struggling with discouragement, I don't suggest to him that he try to *do* something to get out of it. I tell him he needs to *receive* something from God.

When we receive grace, mercy, and love through the Word of God, and when we keep those words through grace, using rebound when we fail, then we have objective love. Objective love is so desperately needed in friendships, between husbands and wives, and in the sacred family values of the home. That quality of love is not produced because of a works program or because we go soul winning more than someone else. It is based upon us receiving the divine nature of God, which brings in virtue and the integrity of grace through His precious promises.

Subjective Love Upholds Us

We are always under grace. If we fail, we fail in grace. If we stay down, we are still in grace. When we get up, we get up in grace. And then we are healed by grace. The psalmist said in Psalm 41:4, "Heal my soul; for I have sinned

against thee.” The prophet Jeremiah cried out, “Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed” (Jeremiah 17:14).

Think of those who struggle to have victory in their lives. God loves them so much that He manifested His life for them on the Cross. His unconditional subjective love always holds them up when they fail. Psalm 145:14 says that God upholds all that fall. No one in the world would do that.

Because of God’s subjective love, when we fall, we are not utterly cast down, though we may think we are (see Psalm 37:24). Our sin says we are cast down. Shame says we are. Failure says we are. But the Word of God says we are *not*.

“The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them” (Deuteronomy 33:27). This is one of the greatest passages in the entire Bible. Think of someone who has failed. There is no place lower. His soul has hit the bottom. Yet this verse says that underneath the bottom are the eternal arms of God!

With this kind of love, God waits to impart His nature, His grace, and His mercy. But He is

also waiting to impart His power so we can stand. Romans 14:4*b* says that God is able to make us stand. In Jude 24, He is able to keep us from falling. We may have to use rebound seven times a day (Proverbs 24:16), but we keep rebounding because our hearts are after God. We keep seeking after God and receiving from Him until finally the Word becomes resident in our souls. It becomes our possession, a well of water that springs up into everlasting life, and a river which flows out to others (John 4:14; 7:38).

CONCLUSION

God is always glorified by giving grace, and He is exalted by giving mercy. When His love is manifested inside of us, then our knowledge is illuminated, His wisdom is applied, and we have peace. Is it any wonder that Proverbs 23:12 says, “Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge”?

Remember, though the manifestation of God’s objective love may change, His subjective love never changes—but it always changes us. The love of God never fails, it is always toward us, and God is just waiting for us to receive it.

Dear Father, we are Your children, and we are just beginning to learn about Your amazing love. Our prayer is that together we would learn this message. We desire to keep on receiving this love so our capacity can be enlarged. As the Word of grace is able to build us up, we can begin to experience the characteristics of Your love and the awesome power that changes us. Thank You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.