

Being Loved by God for God's Sake

by John Piper

This sermon delves into the profound concept of being loved by God for God's sake, challenging the common notion of love as centered around oneself. It explores the biblical perspective that God's love is ultimately about His glory and our eternal joy in Him, rather than making us the center of attention. The speaker emphasizes the importance of recognizing God's self-exaltation as the highest form of love, leading to a Copernican revolution in understanding true love and fulfillment in humility, love for others, and worship towards God.

Scripture: Romans 5:6, 1 Peter 3:18, Ephesians 1:5, John 11:1, John 17:1, Isaiah 43:7

Topics: "God's Love", "Humility in Worship"

Description

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Transcript

Let's pray together. Father in heaven, I ask that you would help me now in these few minutes that we have together to speak the truth. I pray that your name would be central and supreme.

Help me to spread a passion for your supremacy in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ. And I pray that you would give both this campus and East Campus ears to hear and that your glory would become for us the supreme treasure of our lives. So make yourself central to us in our affections and in our thinking.

I pray in Jesus' name, amen. I gave the title, Being Loved by God for God's Sake, and the question I'm posing there is what does it mean to be loved by God? What does it mean to be loved by God? I think you would probably say that's not a hard question because the Bible has some really clear verses on it. For example, you might go to Romans 5, 6 to 8 and say, even while we were weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

Now scarcely for a righteous man would one die, but perchance for a good man one might even dare to die. But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. So that's not a hard

question you might say.

There it is. That's a really clear definition. God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners his Son dies for us.

But why is that love? Why is that good for you? What good comes to you because of that? It's not clear that God's Son dying for you yields anything good for you. It doesn't say anything in the verse about what it gives you. So if you just stop there and say that's love.

Why? What good is coming to you? You roll your eyes and say that's really easy. The forgiveness of sins was purchased there. The removal of guilt was purchased there.

Imputed righteousness was purchased there. Eternal life was obtained there. Hell was escaped there.

To which I would respond, so why is any of that love? What's good for you in that? What's good for you? What's the good for you in that? It's the answer to that question that creates the great divide I think in evangelicalism between whether God is at the center of that answer or you're at the center of that answer. What's good about being forgiven? What's good about having your guilt taken away? Would you answer, I don't like going to bed at night feeling guilty. I would feel much better if I didn't have so many guilt feelings so when the cross takes away my guilt feelings I feel loved.

That's not a good answer. Or what if you said, who wants to go to hell? I mean it's horrible and therefore if I can be rescued from hell by the death of Jesus then I feel loved. That's love that I would be brought out of hell.

Why? Endless virgins in paradise, all the sex you want, just not hell. Endless golf, that would be a kind of hell for me. Maybe not you.

Surfing, ultimate frisbee on the greenest grass forever, 60 degrees, no humidity, not hell, just that. I am loved. Is that the answer? That's a lousy answer.

In other words, all this Bible talk that he died for us, he forgave our sins, he took away our guilt, he provided alien righteousness to us, he got us out of hell, he got us into eternal life does answer the question biblically of what it means to be loved by God. Because you can explain all of those and put yourself square at the center and redefine Bible love, God's love, in a way that it is not. So what is it is the question.

Here's one verse that points to it. 1 Peter 3 18. Christ suffered once the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God.

I'm out of hell to go to God. I'm into life to go to God. My sins are forgiven so that every barrier between me and God would be removed.

I have an alien righteousness so that I can be accepted by God. I can see God, savor God, know God, love God, cherish God, be satisfied in God. If you don't answer the question of being loved in a way that says it's for God's sake that I'm loved, you don't answer it biblically.

Now that creates a huge problem for a lot of people, a huge stumbling block. Because here's the implication. You've got to wear this, own this, love this, and not stumble over it.

This means that all the designs of God to love you are designs to exalt himself. Every millisecond and every bit of energy that God invests in loving you is aimed at exalting himself. And the stumbling block is that doesn't sound love to a lot of people.

I cut out one article here from the London Financial Times by Michael Prowse, reviewing a book. It begins like this. Worship is an aspect of religion that I always found difficult to understand.

Suppose we postulate an omnipotent being who, for reasons inscrutable to us, decided to create something other than himself. Why should he expect us to worship him? We didn't ask to be created. Our lives are often troubled.

We know that human tyrants puffed up with pride crave adulation and homage. But a morally perfect God would surely have no character defects. So why are all these people on their knees every Sunday? That's the epitome of blasphemy.

Because he takes the central biblical truth, God does absolutely everything in loving us for his glory, and says that's a character defect. And you feel that it is, because if you were to live that way it would be a character defect. If John Piper came behind this little pulpit here and said, now my goal today is that when I'm done I would be extolled above all treasures in your life.

Me. You would compute that he's either sick or wicked or tricking us. And God does that precisely.

That's what he does. If he were standing behind this pulpit he would say, I have one goal for you, me. And we would not call it, oh I pray that at Azusa Pacific you do not call that a character defect in the Almighty.

That in everything God does he is magnifying himself. He is looking into every one of your eyes and saying it's all about me. And you do not call that a character defect.

But can you call it love for you? That's the issue. Can you call it love for you? I've spent the last 30 years of my life trying to figure out those two massive realities in the Bible. I cannot escape that God does everything for his glory.

Can't escape it. Ephesians 1, 5, and 6. He predestined us through Jesus Christ unto adoption according to the good pleasure of his will to the praise of his own glory. Bring my sons from afar, my daughters from the ends of the earth, everyone whom I created for my glory.

Isaiah 43, 7. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good deeds and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. For my sake, for my sake I defer my anger. For the sake of my praise I restrain it for you.

I have refined you but not like silver. I have tried you in the furnace. For my own sake, for my own sake I do it.

How shall my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another. Isaiah 48, 9. God is radically God-centered. His passion for his own glory is unbounded.

And the question is, how is that love to me? The reason we can't get it so easily is because we've so embraced the world's conceptions of what it means to be loved. What it means to be loved in America today is to be made much of. Make me feel central.

Make me feel significant. Make me feel valued. Make my worth the center of your life and I will feel loved.

You all breathe that air. The Bible vision of being loved is not being made much of by God but rather being freed by God from bondage to that craving to enjoy making much of him forever. Test yourself.

Test yourself. Do you feel more loved by God because he makes much of you or because he frees you at the cost of his son's life to enjoy making much of him forever? If you have a Bible, I invite you to turn with me to John chapter 11 because in John 11, there's a little story with a massive implication on this point and it's the one that has been gripping me for the last several years and I would like you to see it. John 11, the first six verses.

Here's the question we're asking. Jesus, you and your father seem to be in a conspiracy to get glory for each other. Where do I fit in? How is this passion for your own glory a love to me? Now, a certain man, this is John 11, 1. Now, a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and his sister Martha.

It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. So, this is somebody who loved Jesus very much and he had affections for her and that whole family. Verse 3, so the sister sent to him saying, Lord, he whom you love.

So, mark that word. This is about love. He whom you love is ill.

When Jesus heard it, he said, this illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God. Now, there's the second issue.

We have them both in front of us now. This is about love. This is about glory.

When Jesus heard it, he said, this illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God so that I, the Son of God, may be glorified through it. And now he repeats the love piece.

Verse 5, now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, and I don't know whether your version has it or not. If you've got an old NIV, you don't have it, but it's coming out in a new version because the Greek, for all you Greek students, is *un*. So, or therefore, verse 6 begins with a therefore, not a yet, but a therefore, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was and let him die.

Now that therefore, at the beginning of verse 6, has a whole world in it. Let's read it so you can see it again. They come and they say, sick Lord, he's dying.

The one whom you love, and you love us, and you love him, and he's dying. Verse 5, now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, therefore, he let him die. That's what it says, plain and simple.

Let's read Don Carson's commentary on this and you'll see that *un* taken very seriously. Now how do you make sense out of that? The whole world would rise up and say, this is not what love does. Love doesn't put people through a little personal Katrina.

Yes, it does. If something more loving can come than the escape from death, namely the revelation of the glory of God. Verse 4, when Jesus heard, he said, this illness does not lead to death.

It is for the glory of God. Therefore, because he loved them, he let him die so that the glory of God could be displayed, because the glory of God is more important than life. And if you want to love somebody, you don't just keep them alive.

You've got teams going to New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Burlington, Waveland. You've got teams going there. Why? If it isn't ultimately about satisfying their souls everlastingly with God, you don't love them.

Preparing people for hell, comfortable on the way, is not love. It's not love for God. It's not love for you.

The goal in all of our loving, all of our getting arms around. We've got teams there too from Bethlehem. The goal is in the display of our good works, Matthew 5, 16, that they may glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Because if you leave them without the ultimate treasure, you're not loving like God loves. You know, there is a, turn over to chapter 17. This is even more amazing.

The point of those six verses was this. In order to love us, God must display to us for our own everlasting joy, the fullness of His glory, which is why it's not a contradiction for God in all the designs of His love to be designing His self-exaltation. He is the only being in the universe for whom self-exaltation is the highest virtue and the most loving act.

If you copy Him in this, you blaspheme. You cannot exalt yourself and call it love because you're not worth it. But He exalts Himself and calls it love because He is worth it.

He is the only treasure that will satisfy our souls. Therefore, He's the one being that must be radically self-exalting as He is radically loving because they're the same. Look at the beginning of this high priestly prayer.

I assume with you that this is a loving prayer. May I assume that, that when Jesus prays for us, He is loving us in this chapter. And He says He's praying for us because, in verse 20, He says, I ask not only for these but for those who will believe on me through their word.

That's everybody in this room who's a believer. This is a stunning chapter because it's the one chapter in the Bible where Jesus says, I'm praying for 21st century young people. So here's what He prays.

It blows you away. First five verses is all about Him, not you. When Jesus had spoken these words, He lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come.

Glorify me, your Son, that the Son may glorify you. That's the conspiracy I was talking about. Since you have given Him authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom you've given Him.

Oh, we say, well that starts sounding familiar. I know John 3.16, I know eternal life for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him may not perish but have that, that, that's love. But look at the next verse.

This is eternal life that they know you, the only true God, and me whom you have sent. Of course, in other words, glorify me that I may glorify you because you gave me the power to produce eternal life, which is knowing that, seeing that, savoring that, enjoying that forever. Verse four, I glorified you on the earth having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.

Now, Father, glorify me, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. Isn't that a strange way to begin a prayer for you? You've got to get this, you've got to get this because otherwise you will just sink in the morass of 21st century self-centered American evangelicalism. When Jesus undertakes to pray for His own, He spends the first five verses saying, Father, let's glorify each other.

Help me, Father, I'm coming through the cross and now as I obey you in the cross, bring me out and give me the glory that I had with you before the world was. That's love for you. How so? Verse 24 puts it all together for us.

1724, Father, I desire that they also whom you have given to me may be with me where I am to see my glory. It just doesn't get any better. Depending on whether you see it, has Jesus become for you so satisfying in His glorious power and justice and wisdom and love that being loved means being enabled to make much of His greatness to my own everlasting satisfaction? Or does your heart still crave in a kind of bondage, I must be liked, I must be made much of, I must be central, people must recognize me or I don't feel loved.

It'll change everything in your life. Let me end by recalling a book that I just looked at. I just got a book in the mail that just was published.

It's the translation of Adolf Schlatter's Kennedy Jesus. Do you know Jesus? Do we know Jesus? And I didn't know this was going to be translated because when I was in Germany 30 years ago, I found the first edition of that old book written in 1937 by one of the Tübingen scholars, Adolf Schlatter, who was a great old saint and began to use it for personal devotion. There's a devotion for every day and now it's in English.

Just do we know Jesus? But what I didn't know that came out in the introduction to this translation was this is the last book he wrote. He was 85 years old in 1937. Germany was entering into its most horrible period in history.

He would die rather than see it. And he was writing this book, Do We Know Jesus?, meditating 365 meditations on gospel texts to strengthen his own heart as he moved towards death as well as share it with others. And then my mind linked up with John Owen, one of my great heroes from the 1600s.

Owen, his last book was called The Glories of Christ. He was working on the glories of Christ as he was moving toward death and it just it just clobbered me that here's an early 1900s and a 1600s old man getting ready to die and what do they do? They cultivate meditation on the glories of Christ because they know and it's they're feeling it just like some of you who have perhaps a terminal disease right now feel how soon it's gonna be that you're gonna see him face to face. What will it be like? Will you have cultivated now a being loved that is not a being made much of but a seeing and savoring and being satisfied with him? If not, what will you say? What will you say? How will you feel if tonight is your hour and you stand before the everlasting King and you spent all your time trying to get loved in the man-centered way of make much of me make much of me instead of oh that I might make much of you and be satisfied in you and delight in you and see the glory that you died to purchase for me.

I hope that you don't wait until you're 60 like me or 80 like John like Adolph Schlatter to begin to meditate on the glories of Christ which to exalt is to be loved. Here are the three things that will happen in your life if you catch on to what I'm saying. Number one, the root of all sin will be severed namely pride.

It is a great liberty to be freed from yourself. It is a great liberty. Number two, you will be fitted to love other people because loving other people is not making them feel central, not making them feel supreme.

Loving other people means doing whatever it takes and it may take the laying down of your life to make them see Jesus as their infinite treasure and be satisfied in him. And thirdly, you will be fulfilled in your quest and purpose to worship God, that is to reflect back to God the worth, the infinite worth that he is in himself. So humility, love to other people, and worship to God will follow the Copernican revolution of discovering that being loved by God does not mean being made much of by God but being freed at great cost to God, the death of his son, to enjoy making much of God forever.

So Father, I pray now that as these few thoughts about the centrality of God in the heart of God and the centrality of Christ in the heart of Christ and your unbounded passion for your self-exaltation has landed on these students, I pray, oh God, that you would cause them to feel that this is love. And would you grant them to have a revolution in their affections and in their emotions and in their thinking so that they move out of the center and put you at the blazing center of the solar system of their lives and discover the sweetness of the satisfaction of looking away from you, looking through the mirror and turning it into the window onto the glory of Christ. In his name I pray.

Amen.

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