

“God Loved (Part 1)”
By Brother Kenneth Ray
Sunday, January 13th, 2012

Today we'll look and talk about our relationship with Jesus Christ. There are many areas in that relationship: 1) How God loves us. 2) How we love God 3) How we can be a light to our family 4) What kind of legacy do we leave—What do people say about us? (or, our reputation—your reputation is what people know you by. If you don't do good work, people know that).

Over the next couple of Sundays—maybe—focus on one area of our relationship: How God loves us. This will help us to have a better, purer, more understandable, and clearer relationship with our God, with our family, with our circle of influence, with ourselves. All of us have a circle of influence—I have two dogs, so I know that I at least influence them. This will also help you to understand how to have a better relationship with yourself.

The Bible says to draw closer to God, actually the Bible says, “Draw nigh to God” (James 4:8). Now, if you're like me, you've heard it before; this is not something new. I've heard that many times. It sounds so simple... Nothing is as easy as it looks. It is at the core, the center,, of what brings balance to our life and makes us the Christian that God wants us to be (notice I said the Christian that *God* wants us to be. There's the Christian that *I* want to be, and then there's the Christian that *God* wants me to be. When I have a proper relationship with God, it helps me to be the Christian He wants me to be.

Let's look at how God loves us.

1 John 4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Propitiation is atonement, a means of appeasing. Herein is love, that God sent His Son, to be the atonement, or appeasement for our sins. Any time (or maybe every time) that we study God's love, we must understand that it is unconditional, there are no strings attached to God's love. If you root for the 'right' football team, He will not love you more. If you're from a certain state—you know, everyone seems to live in God's country... I lived in Montana—God's Country. I lived in Southern California—God's Country. I thought it was all God's Country, personally—but there are no strings attached; God's love is unconditional. You may think, “How can I get God to like me more? How can I earn God's love?” I'm going to tell it to you as simple, and as plain as it can get: God loves you. You can't do anything to make Him love you more and there's nothing you can do to make Him love you less. He unconditionally loves you, regardless of where you're from or what you've done, who you root for, what your status is, God loves poor, middle-class, and rich people unconditionally. Now, return on investment, that's a different story, and we're not going to talk about that today. That's it; God loves you and He loved both you and me before we loved Him. So many look back at their lives and say, “Me?” Yes, you (some of us have a life where the sin-factor is greater than others). I'm not saying that's a bad thing; I'm just saying that it is. Because you may have that in your life—you may have a life that has more sin in it than someone else's—and you may think, because of that, that there is no way God could love you as much as someone who didn't do all that stuff. There's no way; I've hurt Him too bad. He loves you, unconditionally, the same. We, as people, will not

love you the same, unconditionally, but the Bible says that His ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8), and we prove that every day. What about the people on death row? There are always people who want to say, well, what about those people? The Bible tells about, “Do you think those people are worse sinners?” and it goes on to say, “No, but except you repent.” (Luke 13:4-5). But there are people on Death Row, deservedly so, and guess what? God loves them, yes, even them, because He does not put conditions on how much He loves them. How can God love this murderer? You’ve heard about the shooting in that movie theater, and the shooting of those young children in that school—How can God love that person? Because, “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” All of them. We all know John 3:16; we see those signs held up at football games, “For God so loved the world...” and you notice that there are no qualifications in that. That was everybody.

God loves all of us; we are His creation. God’s unconditional love is hard to define. John chose not to define it but to give an example of it in 1 John 4:10. Let’s look at some other examples of God’s love: First, Jesus on the cross—just before His physical body died on the cross.

Luke 23:33-34 ...they crucified him, and the malefactors...

So here is Christ placed between two people who very much deserved to be where they were; they had done one thing that made them worthy of crucifixion. Here is our savior in between two men that were worthy, and He was not worthy; He did nothing wrong, so why was He there? Why? because He loves us. That’s unconditional love. He didn’t deserve to be there; who was He taking the fall for? It wasn’t the angels. It wasn’t the Holy Ghost. That narrows it down to us, mankind. Because He loved us, and because it was unconditional—you’ve got to remember, He’d already wiped the world out once, with the great flood, Noh and the ark, and then we started over again. Jesus, because of His unconditional love, looked down and saw how we were, and He was willing to go to the cross, for us. He said, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” Question: Why did Jesus choose to talk to His Father out loud? Why didn’t He say that with His inner voice? Why did He say it out loud, so that people could hear it? Because in His final hour, with His final strength, Jesus was teaching us a lesson (or *the* lesson) about *who* He came to save. Jesus came to save sinners. When he spoke out, He was teaching that.

Anyone every not get their way and cry, “That’s not fair.”? If Jesus had been just and if Jesus had been fair, we would not have Him, wanting to go on the cross. Instead of receiving His love, unconditionally; we would receive condemnation, because condemnation is our just reward. Who did He come to save? sinners.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

You can’t just pray for it, you can’t just accept it in your heart, you can’t just send money to the televangelist, you can’t buy a book; it says *through* Jesus Christ our Lord. How’d that happen? It says on that cross, because of unconditional love, regardless of our actions. Jesus is telling us that He came to save sinners, that means you, that means me, that means our neighbors, the greater Waukegan area, Louisiana, the North, South, East and West, the guy that runs the joint, everyone. You see, the Roman soldiers were owed legal wages according to their

work, and their agreement with Rome. If a Roman soldier was not paid, then whoever was in charge of paying them would get in serious trouble because they broke the agreement that they had. If we were truly to get paid, according to our worth, according to what the Word tells us, it wouldn't be Heaven; it would not be forgiveness, it would be condemnation. We are not paid that way, that's why we call it Grace. That is why it is called Grace. I get paid every two weeks, for being an electrician. I have a time sheet, I punch in, and my boss, he looks at it, and he has these jobs that he gives us, and according to those work packages, he charges them time for that, and then we get paid, according to the jobs that we got done. Because the wages of sin is death—and I'm full of it (Romans 3:23)—but, because I'm *not* paid that way, it's the grace of God, and that unconditional love, that I receive.

I'm going to say something, and you'll need to listen fully: The only condition of God's love being active in your life is that you accept it. What about repentance? What about baptism? What about take up your cross? These are all real things, and worthy of study—worthy of obedience—but, the only condition for God's love to be active in your life is to accept it. If you look at all of those other things, they require us to be active in something, it does not require something to be active in us. That something must first be active in us that we may react *to* it. If you don't accept God's love, do you think that you'll ever get to the point of repentance or baptism or taking up your cross? There's always a pre- everything. The only condition for God's love to be active in your life is for you to accept it. I don't need you to be baptized in Jesus' name for God's love to be active in your life. Now, once God's love is active in your life, it will cause other things to happen. I didn't say that they only thing you need to do to be saved is to accept it, I said the only condition for God's love to be *active* in your life is for you to accept it.

Hebrews 12:2 ...for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame...

Why does God refer to the sacrifice of His Son as a joy? Anybody ever try to lose weight? Isn't that a sacrifice? Do you count that sacrifice as a joy? I count the results as joy, but not the sacrifice. Ever try to give up a food that you like for health reasons? It's usually not something that you don't like eating, it's something that you have way too much of. "Hallelujah, I can't eat prime rib anymore!" So, why does God refer to the sacrifice of His Son as a joy? Nails in His hands and feet, thorns in His brow, they whipped Him, stuck a spear in His side (well, granted, He was gone by the time they stuck the spear in His side), it wasn't a treat. Jesus willingly did that, and God said that it was a joy. I don't serve an insane God, but, with our human understanding, you would think, "That's nuts!" If I came to you and said, "I'm going to kill your kid, painfully, and you're going to have joy in that," you'd be thinking, "Yeah (sarcastically)." Even though it cost the life of His Son, God was glad to be reconciled to us again. God loved us so much that He took joy in the shame, He took joy in the pain, because our sins were now forgiven. The Holiest of Holies—that curtain was rent. We didn't have access to that close of a relationship with God until Jesus gave up the ghost for our sins. Who could go in there? Only one guy; the high priest. And even he had to be squeaky clean, or they wouldn't hear the bells any more, and they would have to pull him out. So now, because of one guy, Jesus Christ, we are able to have a closer relationship and soon, church, a face-to-face relationship.

Next week we will conclude with part two of "God Loved." This week, I want you to work on meeting the only condition to have God's love active in your life: accept it.