

Are We Preaching “Another” Gospel: A 31-Day Journey toward Rediscovering the Gospel of the Grace of God

by C. D. Hildebrand, 24-7-365 Version 2026

Day 24

TO LOVE OR BE LOVED

While the Old Covenant commanded Israel to love God, the New Covenant emphasizes how much God loves us! Even in commanding us to love each other, Jesus explains in what manner we are to love, adding “as *I* have loved you.” We spend so much time and energy trying to show/prove our love for God through carrying out our long list of spiritual disciplines, that we seldom take time to recognize how deeply *He* loves us. Yet Scripture clearly teaches us that love is not about *our* love for God, but about *His* love for us.

1 John 4:10

*In this is love, **not** that we loved God, but that **He** loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

In some cases, we even minimize the importance of God’s love for us with some sort of twisted idea that highlighting His love for *us* is to become self-focused or shallow. “Let us move on to the deeper things of God,” we often hear.

Please tell me, if anyone can, is there something more important, something deeper than God’s love for us?

Ephesians 3:14-19

*For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; **that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— ¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.***

God *wants* us to realize how immensely He loves us! When we know

and believe how deeply we are loved, we are filled with all of His fullness, and those rivers of living water begin to overflow. How could anything be more marvelous than knowing we are loved by the living God?

This Covenant is not about us. It's about Jesus. The Old Covenant was between God and the Children of Israel. This New Covenant is between the Father and the Son. Just as God caused Abram to fall into a deep sleep so that the covenant He made with him would be an everlasting covenant which would not be dependent upon Abram keeping it, so God has taken us out of the way so that we are not able to break His covenant. It's not about us and what we do. It's about Jesus and what *He* did to show His love for us. It's not about loving God with all of our heart, soul, mind, body, and strength in order to demonstrate our love for God. It's about Him giving his heart, soul, mind, body, and strength to demonstrate His love for us (Rom. 5:8). He simply asks us to receive this love and then love each other. Emphasizing our love for God is self-focused because it is all about our efforts.

We need to remind ourselves of this basic truth: God loved us when we were His enemies, before we did one single thing to show our love for Him. Thus, His love for us is initially and forever completely undeserved.

Romans 5:6-10

*For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. ⁸ **But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.***

⁹ Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. ¹⁰ For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Notice that the word “demonstrates”¹ is in the present tense. His own love for us is continually shown to us through the fact that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. What were we doing that would be worthy of meriting God's love before believing in Him? Nothing!

This equation does *not* change after we become Christians.

In fact, it appears that His love for us even intensifies, saying that “much more now” having been justified (made righteous) by His blood, we will also be saved from wrath through Him. We were reconciled through the death of His Son, but now we are saved by His life—the very life that resides

¹ “Demonstrates” means commends, presents as worthy.

within us.

Being reconciled to God means we are at peace, not war, with Him. We do not need to fear His wrath. We are no longer enemies. We are friends. He is our Father. We are His beloved children.

Romans 5:1-2

*Therefore, having been justified by **faith**, we have **peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also we have access by faith into this **grace** in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

Romans 8:15-17

*For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to **fear**, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.”*

*¹⁶ **The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,** ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.*

This insidious indoctrination that devalues God’s love for us and our position as His beloved children begins almost immediately.

I so clearly remember one day very early into my adult walk with God, still a teenager, being overtaken with joy, realizing the fact that God, Creator of heaven and earth, was my Father. As I walked along my way to a downtown coffeehouse outreach that our church sponsored, I began to compose a very sweet song.

*My Father made this world
And everything in it!
My God made you and He made me.
He gave His only Son
To purchase my pardon
He gave his life to set me free!*

It was pretty exhilarating to have this lovely melody rise up in my heart, accompanied by the precious knowledge of God’s greatness and love for me, so I didn’t hesitate to share my burgeoning composition with an “older” brother in the Lord who worked there, thinking that he would be blessed by it, too. I will never forget his response. He seemed pretty unimpressed and even *annoyed* by my fanciful lyrics and said, “Why don’t you write a song about picking up your cross and dying with Jesus?” So innocent was I, and so eager to please, that I changed my song right there on the spot to:

Pick up your cross and die with me

*You will also rise again with me.
Lay down your life and lose it.
You will also gain it one day.
He who seeks to save His life
Will lose it one day,
But He who forsakes all will gain.*

Certainly, when we come to Christ, we die and then rise with Him, but can you see my point about the immediate programming that diminishes the wonders of God's love for us? This fellow was not amused that I was actually basking in the joy of God's love and our relationship as Father and daughter, so he saw to it that my joy was *squelched*. I never finished the first song in favor of the second, and was even asked to sing the altered version for our church. It was my reward for conformity and, sadly, it began to eat away at my awareness of God's love for me.

1 John 3:1-3

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. ² Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

The God who created everything loves you. Yes, you personally. His love isn't some cosmic blanket thrown over all, but is extended to each and every individual. His love isn't measured out to you based on your degree of faithfulness and obedience. Just as the prodigal son's father continued to love him and welcomed him with open arms when he returned, so your Father loves you, no matter what sin you are battling or how small your perception of your contribution to His kingdom may be. **You are His child, and His love for you is not based on your productivity.**

While it is *common* for a Christian to doubt that God loves him, it is not *normal*. If you're not aware His love, there is a *reason*. God *wants* you to experience His love and His presence. Don't skip over these thoughts, rationalizing that it's not important or that it's "just the way it is". Ask God to show you why. He will.

We often think of the words written to the Ephesians about leaving their first love.² We assume that their love *for* God had waned; yet,

² We don't know whether this is the Ephesian church of John's time or an end time church yet to come, but we do know that they lost their first love, and the same thing can happen.

contextually, this makes no sense, for they were zealous for God in every way. Read this passage, noticing how diligent they showed their love for God.

Revelation 2:1-4

*“To the angel of the church of Ephesus write,
‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand,
who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: ² “I know
your **works**, your **labor**, your **patience**, and that you **cannot bear
those who are evil**. And you have **tested those who say they
are apostles and are not, and have found them liars**; ³ and you
have **persevered** and have **patience**, and have **labored for My
name’s sake and have not become weary**. ⁴ Nevertheless I have
this against you, that you have left your first love.*

Given the church’s current understanding of “first love” being that of us “giving our all” to please our Lord, it sure does seem to me that the Ephesians would be a glowing example to any church of loving God with all of their hearts, souls, minds, and strength. In what way were they not pleasing God? It seems that God was entirely pleased with how they were living and serving Him.

Could it be that because we have missed the fact that the New Covenant is based on God loving *us*, that we have misinterpreted what it means to leave one’s first love? Isn’t our first love the knowledge of *His* love, the joy of knowing we are loved by *Him*—our relationship vs. religion understanding? All of us remember that joy of coming to Jesus “just as I am without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me.”³ We can almost feel the exhilaration of knowing we were forgiven and accepted in the Beloved. How thankful we were! How overwhelming was our sense of His love. Friends, that is the love the church has left, our first love—that of knowing we are loved by God and simply believing and receiving it.

We work so diligently to please God, just as did the Ephesians, and God appreciates all our hard work, but He has something against us, something so powerful that he said to the Ephesians if they didn’t return to it, he was going to remove their lampstand. I dare say that I believe God is speaking to many churches and many individuals today. We have labored and demonstrated our love for God, **but have sidelined His love for us. He wants that relationship to be restored.**

God loves us. Glory, glory, hallelujah! He is demonstrating His love to

to us.

³ A. H. Brown and Charlotte Elliott, 1835, Public Domain

us, not through angel feathers and gold dust, but by giving His Son to die for us. His sacrifice is continually shouting from Calvary, “I love you! I love you! I love you!” God wants a relationship with you—a living, *loving* relationship with you. Just like a parent who delights in his child playing with a gift he has received, **God wants you to enjoy everything that His precious Son died to give you.** He wants to graciously give you all things. He wants to do exceedingly abundantly above all that you can ask or think according to the power that is working in you (Eph. 3:20). He wants to pour His love and grace upon you, not only “for a season”, but for your entire lifetime, and He wants you to proclaim to His people His unconditional and never-ending love for them by what you teach and how you treat them.

1 John 3:18

My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

Let me say this again. We need to understand that being a Christian is not, not, not, about *us* and what we do. It’s about *Jesus* and what *He* did. Salvation, then, isn’t simply where we begin, but how we continue to walk.

Colossians 2:6-10

*As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, **so walk in Him,*** ⁷ *rooted and built up **in Him** and established in the **faith (in Him),*** *as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.*

⁸ *Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.* ⁹ *For **in Him** dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;* ¹⁰ *and **you are complete in Him,*** *who is the head of all principality and power.*

When we put the focus on ourselves and what we do instead of on Jesus and what He did for us, we leave our first love. It’s not that our hard work goes unnoticed by God, but that our hard work is not what He desires most from us. He knows that when we know we are loved, good works will follow, but the good works must not become the focus, but remain the fruit. He has made us complete in Him so that we may walk in Him in the same way we received Him—by grace through faith. His love for us is our first love. Our love for God is the fruit of our first love.

This truth came alive recently, when a friend of ours who has been unhealthy for years rediscovered the truth of God’s love for her. Now, this friend has not been in ministry and scarcely attended church for many years due to the intense physical pain she suffered daily. As she walked

into the building where we were having one of our meetings, the pain she'd suffered for so long left her, and has not returned. More amazingly, when she realized that God loves her and He isn't asking her to do anything to earn His love, the next desire she expressed was to work with her husband in ministry, from nothing to everything almost instantly. That is the power of knowing we are loved.

Clearly, this is what God desires—to bring us to a place where we are convinced that His love for us and blessings to us are by His grace and not as a result of works. When we finally see His amazing love for us, the works for which we've been created become our desire and our joy (1 Cor. 15:10).