

Love Chose

Our lives are full of choices. Just think of how many choices you have already made today: you decided what time to get up this morning, you decided what clothes to wear, you decided what to eat for breakfast, you decided what time you were going to leave home to get here, you decided where to put down your chair. Maybe you didn't make all those decisions because someone made them for you. Parents will do that for their children because they are growing up and still learning how to make good choices. Spouses will do that for each other because that is how a good marriage works.

Of all the choices that we will make in our lives, there is one that none of us have any control over—we cannot choose God. We cannot choose to believe in him or decide to put our faith in him. By nature, by default, we are enemies of God and want nothing to do with him or his laws. We are born spiritually dead and no dead body is able to take any kind of action or make any kind of decision. If given a choice we would reject God every time and prefer to follow the sinful ways of the devil, the world and our own sinful nature.

So it's good that it's not our choice. In his great love God chose us. This is remarkable because of who we were—God had no reason to choose us or love us, he had every right to condemn us to hell for our sins and the rebellion of our old self. And yet he chose us anyway to be holy and blameless in his sight. That is great love, specifically God's agape love that would love the unlovable.

God's choice is also remarkable because he chose us before the creation of the world, before time began. He did not choose us because he thought we would be better than others or that we would be more receptive to the gospel, he simply chose us in accordance with his pleasure and will. When we talk about this idea of predestination, notice we are not saying that he chose the rest to be unbelievers. The Bible never speaks that way. If someone does not believe, they have rejected God. If someone believes, God has chosen them. It is a mystery beyond our understanding. But we treasure our chosen position, we treasure God's great love that would choose us to be adopted as his own.

Ephesians 1:4,5 – ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.

Love Sent

How do you send your love to someone else? Maybe you send a letter or note or email or text message to let them know you're thinking of them. Maybe you send a card for a special occasion, a birthday or anniversary. Maybe you send a gift, whether small and thoughtful or large and extravagant. Maybe you send flowers as a surprise or as a way to say you're sorry.

So how did God send his love? He sent his one and only Son. Think about that for a moment. Would you do that? Would you show your love to someone else by sending your son or daughter to live with them? Now you might send a child to spend a couple of days with grandparents or friends, but for the long term? I don't think so. Even if you were to possibly consider it, you would only do so if you knew your child would be safe. You would never do so if you thought the child would be in danger.

Yet that was not the case with God. He did not send his Son to a world where he would be safe and well taken care of. He sent him to a world of unlovable sinners. And so Jesus would face rejection and suffering and death. That is great love—to send your love by sending your Son to be put to death for people who are unworthy and undeserving.

But it was all necessary because Jesus was sent as a sacrifice. All the sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed ahead to Jesus who would be the ultimate sacrifice for the entire world. We don't have to spend our eternity in hell paying for our sins because through Jesus' death, those sins are paid for and our guilt is

removed. Our relationship with God has been repaired and restored, all because of the great love that he showed to us by sending his Son to take our place.

1 John 4:9,10 – ⁹This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Love Found

What happens when you're out walking and you see a quarter lying on the side of the road? Do you stop to pick it up? Do you keep on walking? It does have some value, but not very much. There is not much you can buy for 25 cents anymore. A quarter found on the side of the road is certainly not a great treasure. But when God found us he did not keep on walking, so to speak. We had no intrinsic value and yet because of his great love we were included in Christ, we were made a part of his family all in response to the gospel message.

If you were out walking and found not a quarter, but a wallet, that would be a different story. You would check the wallet for some form of identification so that the wallet and its contents could be returned to the rightful owner. That's what we do. When we own something we put our name on it because it belongs to us. Perhaps your name is on the dish you brought for the picnic or on the chair you're sitting on right now. We put our name on things so that if we lose them, they can be found and returned to us.

God has also put his mark of ownership on us because we belong to him. We were sealed with the Holy Spirit at our baptisms. Through water and the Word we were sealed as God's children, a promise that he will never break. We have the Holy Spirit in our lives right now as a deposit, a down payment of the eternal inheritance we are looking forward to in heaven. So when life bears down on us, when it tries to make us feel like we are lost, we can remember that God's love found us. We are not lost and we are not alone because we belong to him.

Ephesians 1:13,14 – ¹³And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

Love Returned

How do young children learn best? They learn by imitation. They will mimic the behavior they see, they will parrot whatever words they hear spoken. My wife and I have two little imitators running around at home. They will copy us, they will copy each other, whether the behavior is good or bad, safe or dangerous, serious or silly.

As children of God, he wants us to live a life of love. So how do we accomplish this? How do we take God's great love and live it in our lives? It's more than just reading the Bible and trying to check off our list everything that we are supposed to do. Our motivation is not simply obeying God's commands. Our motivation always goes back to God's love, it always goes back to Jesus. We love because Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. That makes us imitators. We see God's love and return that love by living it out in our lives.

Of course, our love will never match Christ's love. Our imitations will fall short. We won't always love very well. We won't always want to show love to everyone around us. But that's why God's love is so great. It covers over a multitude of sins. It continues to give us the opportunity to live that love in our lives.

We couldn't possibly cover in one brief devotion all the ways that we can live a life of love and so we can simply summarize it by looking at Christ's example. He gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. When we live a life of agape love, we live a self-sacrificing love, putting others needs ahead of our own. It's not about us, it's about others, whether family or friends, coworkers or neighbors, strangers or

even those who are against us. We show them love so that they can know God's great love for themselves. We are willing to give up earthly things for ourselves if it means that they will join us in experiencing firsthand God's great love in heaven someday.

Ephesians 5:1,2 – ¹ Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.