

God’s Love not puppy love

You know, when I was at school, girls didn’t really mean much to me. I used to watch (football) instead. ‘Pulling girls’ was only for losers. However, as I got older I began to find a strange fascination with the opposite sex. Not that this meant I was successful in any way. I just didn’t have the confidence, the hairstyle (very short and thug-looking), was wearing street urban hip hop city clothes in a place where few others did. Plus I listened to cutting edge music, which very few others did where I lived.

So off I went to University. I was uncertain but I was going to have a laugh. I started going to parties and women became a key theme. Again, not that it got me anywhere. Until one day I was coming out of a club and I met a girl in a takeaway (despite or because of me wearing an absurd looking hat). Within a week I was going out with this girl. This moving relationship lasted all of 2 months. And that was it. I went round her house one day and she said, ‘It’s not really working out is it?’ I said, ‘Nah. You’re right. See ya.’ and went back home.

I also knew another girl who was desperate to be in a relationship. You know the sort, they’d go out with Mr Ugly of Uglyville with no personality – or who treated her badly – just to be in a relationship of some sort. It was scary. She ‘owned’ her boyfriend who was allowed to have very little of a life outside of her. You probably know a girl like her. It boiled down to low self-esteem and having had little positive attention by her family as a child.

Replace these stories with a story you know – or one that relates to you !

So what is this all about?

Well, other than displaying my complete romantic incompetence – if you haven’t got a girlfriend or a boyfriend, then don’t worry, you’re in good company (40% of the church are single). Even if you have, it’s no guarantee for love or happiness. Only a fool thinks that romantic love can make them truly happy. The thing is, it’s only temporary.

You know God’s love is the only lasting love. It’s something I’ve had to learn and have to keep being reminded of. God loves you more than anything and more than anyone else can. He loves you to bits. When you are happy, God is happy. When you are sad, he is sad. When you sing worship songs to him, God feels dead chuffed. He loves it and loves you. Don’t ever let anyone tell you that you’re not important, not loved.

Listen, God is love. It may not seem like it sometimes but he is. In Hebrews 12, it says that God disciplines the ones he loves. And if you’re a Christian, God loves you and will set aside the wrong things you do. If you’re not a Christian, God still loves you but he wants you to say yes I want to follow Jesus. You know, God let Jesus come down from heaven for you. For you, he was painfully tortured to death. For you. For me. For everyone. If you are a Christian, then God will discipline you. It’s for your own good and shows that God is interested in you, and helping you to be more like him.

If you accept Jesus, Hebrews 2 says you become part of God's family. And listen to 1 Corinthians 12, it says love is the most important thing. Matthew 22:37, Jesus says the most important commandment is to love the Lord your God. Secondly, to love others as you love yourselves. Why? Because God loved you first. Jesus loves you to bits. Don't forget it!

Song of Solomon

One thing we tried very successfully here was getting various people up front to read a few verses of Song of Solomon in the most cheesily romantic way they could. We had a good laugh, painfully funny at times! Why not try it!

God's Love Isn't

Like human love. It is beyond that, way deeper. It is called agape. Nor is God's love some kind of fluffy love for you and me. God's love isn't temporary, like human love. God's love doesn't have conditions attached to it, if we are sons of God. God's love isn't changeable, or dependent on moods or emotions. God's love isn't selfish, self-seeking or self-serving. God's love isn't a romantic love, it isn't something that we should treat lightly. Most interestingly, God's love isn't just about love as we think it may be, it's more complex – we'll explain more below..

God's Love Is

God's love can be expressed in Genesis 1 and 2 from the fact that he created man and woman. He created them in his image and gave them an incredible place to live (Garden of Eden), had Adam name all the animals and birds in the garden (great responsibility and must have taken a long time!) He also walked with them, hung out with them, was there with them, in close Godly relationship with them. He was their God, they were his people. Even when man and woman sinned (Genesis 3), God was merciful and clothed them nicely. In fact, the name Methuselah means 'then the end will come'. Methuselah lived to 969 years (Genesis 5), living so long because God didn't want to judge his people – when Methuselah died, the Great Flood came.

We see throughout the Bible that God willed his people to love him. Too many times people did not love him back. But God persisted and gave people many chances to return to him. The 10 Commandments and the Law given in Exodus, Deuteronomy, Leviticus, were laws given to the people of Israel to remain in their right-standing with God (not laws given to obey to be right with God). But people constantly rejected him. Eventually, God sent Jesus to enable man to get right with God (by accepting Jesus as Lord). Even today, many Christians can tell of the fact that God has given them many chances. We know that even members of death-squads are not beyond God's love (the Apostle Paul)!

So we know the kind of love God has in the way that he sent his only Son, Jesus, to die for us. In fact, the Bible tells us that Jesus willingly died. In the Garden of Gethsemane before he knew he was about to be betrayed, his prayer to God was, 'I don't like what is going to happen, I'd rather not go through it, but I will do whatever you ask, Father, I want to – your will be done, not mine.'

1 John 3.16 summarises it this way: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."

God's love in his people also demonstrates the character of God. A woman named Charlotte Wertheim was recently interviewed on a programme called 'In-Depth' on GOD TV. She mentioned a conversation with a Muslim student she knew. She explained the difference between God (Yahweh), and the Muslim god (Allah) in this way. 'My God says that I should lay down my life for you.. Your god tells you that you may have to kill me.' He agreed.

But God's love is not an endless bundle of love. There are consequences to love. If we disobey God, step outside of what he has told us to do, walk away from him, God will usually let us do this (he loves us that much). But there will be consequences to that action. So, when Eve disobeyed God (and then Adam went along with this), God had to throw them out of the Garden (it was no longer perfect). But God had angels stand guard so no-one could re-enter (and so the way back would be protected until the right time!) Man was set to do hard work all his life, woman had labour pains, the serpent (satan) was given authority to strike at the heel of man (causing injury and suffering). The lives of Adam and Eve became finite (they would die, previously they would not have done) and sin entered into mankind.

Fortunately, while the 'First Adam' sinned, Paul reminds us that the 'Last Adam' (Jesus) died to take away sin. When we accept Jesus, we become new creatures and will live in a perfect new universe one day! So too are there consequences if man rejects God. One day we will stand before Jesus who will judge, separate those whose names are in his Book Of Life. Those who are will inherit the eternal Kingdom of God. Those whose names are not written will be cast into the fiery lakes of hell. It's no scare tactic.

A loving God is also a God who must judge good and evil. His standard is accepting Jesus. You may not like it, but that is very simply what it takes. Then you will find that God's in and through you, will start changing other lives around you. Nothing else, no-one else can do that except Jesus. That is why you, me, everyone in this world needs Jesus.