

God's Love For Us

Reflections on The Gospel Message

- ✓ *Points for personal meditation and prayer.*
- ✓ *Helps for self-examination and checking of attitudes towards God, sin and forgiveness.*
- ✓ *Thoughts for sermons, talks, catechisms classes, and sundry events on the unconditional Love of God for us*
- ✓ *Meant for all audiences*

PART ONE

Gospel Message: God loves us freely and unconditionally.

Reflect and pray on the following texts:

John 3/14-21 (Specially verses 16 and 17)

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not die but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to be its Judge, but to be its Saviour”

Luke 2/8-11 (Specially 10 and 11)

“Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all people! This day your Savior is born – Christ the Lord!”

Romans 3/9-32 (Specially 22 to 26)

“God puts men right through their faith in Jesus Christ.. By the free gift of God's grace they are put right with him through Christ Jesus, who sets them free”

Galatians 4/1-7 (Specially 4 to 6)

“But when the right time finally came, God sent his own Son to show us that you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, the Spirit that cries, Abba, Father (father, my father)”

Ephesians 1/3-14 (Specially 5 and 7)

‘Even before the foundation of the world, God had already decided that through Jesus Christ he would bring us to himself as his sons- this was his pleasure and purpose... for by the death of Christ we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven. How great is the grace of God!’”

1 Thessalonians 5/9-11

“God did not choose us to suffer his wrath but to possess salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us in order that we might live together with him.. For this reason encourage one another, and help one another..

You may also reflect and pray on the passages quoted below:

Romans: Chapters 3,4,5,9,10

Galatians: Chapters 2/15-21; 3; 4/1-7

Ephesians Chapters 1,2

Do we accept God's love or are we rather afraid of Him?

- Though openly, we say that we love God, often enough, emotionally we seem to be afraid of him!
- Though, consciously, we say that we God is a most loving "Father, unconsciously we may be afraid of Him...

Some signs of our "unconscious" fear of God.

- An urge to do penance to make up for our past sins.
- Anxieties, fretfulness.
- Compulsion to do good works.
- Desire to gain merits before God.
- Doubts about our past confessions.
- Dread of making personal decisions for fear to be found wrong.
- Fear of accepting moral responsibilities.
- Fear of freedom! We want to be told what to do.
- Fear of punishments.
- Guilt feelings..
- Moral scruples
- Obsessive adherence to rules, laws, regulations
- Our fear of death and of God's judgement.
- Recalling minding our past mistakes and sins.
- Repetitive general confessions.
- Sticking to "meaningless" religious practices.
- Trying to be perfect. "Perfectionism" Etc...

Likely causes underlining man's fear of God.

- They may have a mistaken image of God as a stern and severely judge, who sentences, condemns and punishes!
- A sneaking fear that God is, not a God of love, but a God of justice!
- Misinterpreting a few Old Testament passages, the may even think of him to be a revengeful and vindictive Lord who makes his enemies suffer
- We think that we have to "appease God's wrath" to regain his favor
- We take it for granted that we have to "merit" eternal life and "earn" our salvation. We tend to trust more in our "good deeds" and "merits" than in God's love and mercy.
- Some believers frantically try to "buy" heaven by their good deeds and meritorious works, yet they find themselves unable to do so! This may lead them to discouragement and despair.
- Some pious people, in practice, value their "external rites and observances" (*such as sacraments, indulgences, blessings, religious practices, novenas, rosaries, retreats, penances, abstinences, alms-giving, scapulars etc*) more than the God's unconditional love for us and the merits Jesus gained for us
- They want to retain "control" of their own lives, to lift themselves by their bootstraps and somehow "work out" their own salvation.
- They cannot throw themselves at the feet of God and confidently pray like this: "Father in heaven, I place myself completely in your hands, I am totally resigned to your will. I entrust my present and my future to you because you know fully

well what is best for me” They find it extremely hard to “let go” and place themselves in God’s hands.

- All said and done, still deep done in hearts of many pious people, the love of God is conceived as “conditional”? *(In other words, God loves us “if we are good... “If” we perform meritorious acts...”If” we obey his commandments, if” ... “if” ... “if”.. Otherwise, he will not love us!)*

Ways to find it out whether we are afraid of God?

First: Check the way you talk about God, especially in your ‘self-talk’

Do you speak like that or in a similar way?

- God will punish me/you/us/them *(God does not punish anyone. God does not inflict suffering on anyone)*
- God is punishing our world for its sins. *(It is we, human beings, who bring so many miseries upon ourselves by our misdeeds)*
- God has forsaken me /him/her/us/them. *(God is ever faithful. He does not forsake anyone. It is we who forsake him! Let us not lay our fault at his door!)*
- God will send me/you/him/her/us/them to hell! *(Again, God does not send anyone to hell! God does not send anyone away from him, it is we who go away from him, it is we who freely walk into hell!)*
- This is a punishment of God: *(God is not vindictive)*
- That is curse of God! *(God only blesses, never curses)*
- We are lost! *(No one, who does not want to be lost, will ever be lost)*

Second: Check the way you relate to God.

Question yourself:

- Do you try obsessively to be good? *(We have to do good deeds, not obsessively, but in an spontaneous way)*
- Do you obey God’s commandments out of compulsion? *(Of course, we have to obey His commandments, not out of compulsion, but in a loving and gentle way)*
- Change your language. Do not say: I have, or I ought, or I must do good deeds, keep God’s law and please Him! Rather say: I wish, I want, I desire, I will serve God because I love Him. *Serving Praising and worshipping God is a matter of love, nor of compulsion.!*

Third: Check your Prayer life.

Answer these questions:

- Why do you pray? To secure Gods love? To gain something? To get God’s favors and graces? No, that’s wrong! *(God’s love and graces are already yours. We pray to worship Him, to thank Him, to praise Him and to show Him our love.)*
- Why do you approach the sacraments? To gain more graces, to gain favor with God? Wrong! *(Sacraments are personal and loving encounters that bring us closer to Christ, not things or devices to make us merit heave)*
- Do you frequent the sacraments routinely or as a matter of course? Wrong! *(Sacraments work best on us if we receive them with faith and love)*

PART TWO Why Are We Afraid of God?

One: The Education we have received:

Although, from childhood days, we have been told by Parents, Priests, Teachers and Elders that God is loving and merciful, in practice in our every-day-life, we have been given the opposite message, viz. That we have to fear God and his-punishments.

We have been told over and over again:

- ✓ Don't do this, don't do that, God will punish you!
- ✓ God will get angry!
- ✓ God will send you to hell! You'll burn there forever!
- ✓ God has punished X. Y. Z.
- ✓ When accidents and calamities take place we hear said; It's a punishment of God!
- ✓ God is fed up of us!
- ✓ God has forgotten us!
- ✓ It's a mortal sin.. Be careful! God will catch you!
- ✓ You have to make penance and amendments so that God may forgive your wrongdoing.
- ✓ It's unpardonable!
- ✓ If you want to please God and make Jesus happy you have to suffer!
- ✓ You have to gain merits to go to heaven!
- ✓ You **have to** pray.. You **have to** go for mass.. You **have to** go for confession.. You **have to**.. You **ought to**..;.. You **must**... **Otherwise God will not love you.**

The sledge-hammer blows of these and similar messages have forged our subconscious:

Two: Unconsciously, we Projected the Experiences of Love, Acceptance and Forgiveness we had in our lives on to God

About love, acceptance and forgiveness we really know only what we have experienced!

In these areas of life, purely intellectual or conceptual knowledge, does not count much.

Most of us, right from childhood days, have experienced love as conditional

- If we wanted mum and dad to love us, we had better be good..
- If we were naughty our parents and teachers pretended to withdraw their love for us. (*Parents, teachers, people do not like naughty boys/girls*)
- Forgiveness was given to us only "conditionally". (*If you want dad, mum, teacher to forgive you, you have to ask for pardon, apologize, do this or that penance..*)
- We were punished, occasionally very severely, for our misdeeds. (*We learned that a "sanction" was attached to each misbehavior*)

The experiences of love, punishment, acceptance, forgiveness, approval, etc, we had in life, contaminated our very ideas and concepts about them.

- Without our realizing it, we transferred all those emotionally charged and experiential concepts of love, acceptance and forgiveness to God!
- In fact, unawares, we made God to our own "image and likeness"!

- We did not think better of God's love, acceptance and forgiveness than we did of their "human" counterparts!
- In real life, our experience was that we had to do things to gain others' love, to secure peoples approval, etc.. So we used that "principle" or "code of conduct" also in our dealings with God.
- In our day-to-day life we relied more on our "merits", our "good deeds" than on the goodwill and trustworthiness of others. Unfortunately, unawares, we adopted the same attitude in our relationship with God.
- In other words, - in our mind - what really counted before God was what we could produce, what we could show, namely, out good deeds, our prayers and sacrifices, our masses and alms-giving, etc....

From experience too we learned that people, as a whole, are taken up more by external appearances than by our inner dispositions and attitudes.

- In this world what really counts is to look good! Therefore, outward formalities, rituals and gestures count a lot.
- What cannot be seen does not count! Unfortunately, we transfer this experience to our dealings with God.
- That's why in all religions formal and external observances, rituals, devotions, prayers, incense-burning, incantations, purification ceremonies, etc. are made much of!
- There are lots of pharisaic attitudes and dishonesty in our religious life and practice
- That's why inner true humility, honesty, love, forgiveness, devotion, trust in God, concern for others are rare virtues.

Many of us have been let down in life by friends and people who were supposed to love us. We felt disappointed, frustrated, disenchanted, cheated! After such painful experiences we were afraid to allow ourselves to be loved afresh!

- The most unfortunate part of it is that we transfer these negative feelings and depressing attitudes to the way we relate with God.
- We find it very hard to let God love us unconditionally when in our human experience we have never met with this kind of love! The rich, red wine of God's love turns watery or even sour in our lips!
- World-wise, people are chary of love.. Even of God's love!

PART THREE How to Get Rid of Our Fear of God?

- **At the very outset we have to state a "postulate"**
There are no "intellectual" remedies for "emotional" problems!
- **Since the problem, of our inability to accept God's unconditional love and forgiveness is an emotional problem, it would be foolhardy, to say the least, to offer you an intellectual solution.**
- **We can only offer you a "practical" one. Take it or leave it! No discussion!**
- **We state our solution in the guise of 24 propositions.**

1. Accept it as a given fact, as a postulate, that God loves you as you are: imperfect, weak, sinful, mean, frail, fickle, and evil-minded as you may see yourself!

2. He made you! He knows how and why he made you!
3. He loves you as he made you, otherwise he would have not made you like as you are.
4. Accept the fact that you are not wicked, but weak! You are not corrupt, but imperfect! You are not infallible, but fallible!
5. Be comfortable with it, be comfortable with yourself.
6. Allow yourself to be loved by God. as you are. He loves you.. Do not ask why? Love has no logic!
7. Desire to be a good person and peacefully and honestly try it. If you succeed, be happy. If not, be at peace!
8. If you fall or sin, please, do not lose your peace! Sincerely say to God: “Lord my God, not because I sinned I love you less. Nor because I sinned, you love me less”.
9. Do not pray or do good deeds in a compulsive way.
10. Do them because you love God, not because you have to do them or because you have to love God!
11. Love cannot be forced on anyone. We can neither force God to love us, nor can God force us to love him! **Forced love is no love!**
12. Allow yourself to spontaneously love God: no fears, no anxieties, and no compulsion.
13. Allow God to love you without fears, no anxieties, no expectations.
14. If you cannot love God freely and spontaneously, you are not bound to do so! God will not make it a sin out of it for you!
15. No one is bound to do what he cannot! God will love you all the same!
16. If you cannot accept God’s love for you, bad luck for you, my friend! Then, still be at peace.
17. Try, however, to remove the blocks that make you impervious to his love. It means that you are “temporarily” prevented both from accepting love and loving both God and others.
18. This is not an irremediable disability. Be patient with yourself as God surely is!
- 19.
20. trust God. He will come to the rescue! Be sure!
21. Leave your past life in the lap of Gods mercy.
22. Leave your future in the hands of his providence..
23. Trusting in God’s boundless love and mercy, enjoy your present moment.
24. Good luck, my friend!

APPENDIX; Teachings and Examples of Our Lord on God’s Love.

Teachings of our Lord.

The parable of the Prodigal Son. Lk 15/11-32 *(Read the Text.)*

The father of the Prodigal was good and loving to the extreme. In the parable he symbolizes God the Father.

- He loved his son totally and unconditionally.
- He loved him when he was at home, when he went away from home, when he returned home. He never withdrew his love from him.
- When the boy was good he loved him, when the boy turned bad he loved him all the same, when the boy repented and came back, he loved him as much as before.
- It was his son even when he ran away from home and got into all sorts of troubles.
- He never punished his son. He did not send him away. It was the boy who “punished” himself by running away from his father
- God never punishes us! God never sends anyone away. It is we who desert God; it is we who bring all sorts of troubles and miseries upon ourselves.
- The father never condemned his son, nor cursed or disowned him.
- In truth, the father had already forgiven his son even before he could decide to return home and ask for pardon.
- The father’s love, pardon and acceptance of his prodigal child remained for ever unchanged! Total! “Unconditional”!
- Yet, the son felt “unworthy” of being accepted again as a son (*Father, I am not worthy to be called your son*)... He could not even imagine that his father loved him with an unconditional love!
- But the father thought otherwise. He considered him as “worthy” to be his son now as much as before (*This son of mine was dead, but now is alive*)
- Whether we are good or bad, we are, all the same, the sons and daughters of God!
- Our behavior will not change reality; we are for ever sons and daughters of God.
- We may be grateful or ungrateful children, faithful or unfaithful but we shall never cease being God’s children. .
- It is not our worthiness or unworthiness that made us God’s children, but God’s infinite and unconditional love.
- In fact, we are not, and we shall never be worthy of being God’s children; radically, whether good or bad, we are not worthy of such privilege.
- It is only because of God’s infinite love and choice, that we are his children.
- It is up to us to accept or to reject him as our Heavenly Father. God will not force on us predilection.
- No merit, no satisfaction, no penance was asked from the Prodigal in order to be taken back home, as son.
- Not that the prodigal was dispensed henceforth, from the obligation of being on his best behaviour at home.
- All the good deeds, henceforth, the repenting Prodigal surely did at home, were not necessary to win his father’s love – he always had it - but they were expressions only of his gratitude and his love for his dad.

The Parable of The lost Sheep Lk 15/1-7 (*Read the Text*).

The Pharisees and the Teachers of the law started grumbling. “This man welcomes outcasts and even eats with them!” (Lk 15/2)

- The Pharisees thought that because they were scrupulously keeping the Thora – the law - they deserved God’s favors and approval.
- Jesus thought otherwise. In teaching and practice he drove home the truth that no amount of observances will ever win for us God’s favor and approval.
- As a Good Shepherd, Jesus went after the lost sheep of his flock.

- When he finds a lost sheep, he does not rebuke or punish him. On the contrary Jesus shows the sinner his love and affection
- As a good shepherd puts the lost sheep on his shoulders and tenderly carries him home, so does Jesus open his arms to receive back the sinner.
- God loves prostitutes, publicans and thieves..(Mt 21/31-32)
- God loves the fallen, the sinners, the lost ones...”the son of man is come to seek and to save the lost” (Lk 19/10)
- Jesus died for all, especially for the unworthy, the proscribed, the scum, the flotsam and jetsam of society.
- It is only the sinner who gets the privilege of being carried by the Good Shepherd on his shoulders.

The parable of the Publican and the Pharisee. Lk 18/9-14 *9Read the Text)*

Jesus told this parable to people who were sure of their own goodness and despised everybody else. (Lk 18/9)

- The Pharisees thought that because they kept all the religious rules and traditions, they were justified before God. However, God thought otherwise.
- They believed that by means of their rigorous observance, they could buy God’s love and acceptance
- They took it for granted that because they contributed to the splendor and maintenance of the temple, God was pleased with them.
- Yet, it wasn’t so. Not that God disapproved such observances: in actual fact he had sanctioned them. However, God does not care for our rites, rituals and rubrics, our sacraments and sacrifices, our prayers and penance’s, if they are turned into “idols” and given a power they do not have, namely the power to buy God’s love.
- What God wants from us is to worship Him in sincerity and truth.
- God offers his love and justification to all those who are willing to accept them in simplicity and humility like the publican of the Gospel parable.
- Courage and implicit trust in God is required to simply say like the publican: “God have mercy on me, a sinner!” and entrust oneself to God’s loving and divine mercy.
- The publican did not mince words. He had no merit of his own to offer, only his abjectness and nothingness.
- We have to cast off the false image we have of our self-righteousness and self-sufficiency and place our trust only in the love and mercy of God..
- We have to acknowledge our “nothingness” in order to be able to receive the “fullness” of God. “For everyone who makes himself great will be humbled, and everyone who humbles himself will be made great” (Lk 18/14)

Examples of our Lord.

The woman caught in Adultery (Jo 8/1-11) *(Read the Text).*

“Did anyone condemn you?” “No sir,” she said, “Well then,” Jesus replied, “I do not condemn you either. Go, but do not sin again.”

- She was a sinner, but she was a daughter of God all the same.

- Jesus did not approve of her behavior. Jesus remarked: .“Go, in peace, but sin no more” (Jo 8/11) yet, accepted her all the same: “I do not condemn you either “(Jo 8/11)
- Jesus comforted her in her trouble, but discomfited the Pharisees, who were so sure of their goodness and justice. “When they heard this they all left one by one, the older ones the first” (Jo 8/9)
- On that day, she was the only one who left the place in peace. All the rest, - the righteous ones - left in confusion!
- The humility she had in accepting her fault won Gods approval. She did not defend herself, she accepted her sin.

Zacchaeus (Lk 19/1-10) *(Read the Text)*

He was humble enough to climb the sycamore tree to see Jesus. He was generous enough to accede to Jesus’ wish to stay in his home.

He acknowledged his sinfulness, his rapacity and dishonesty. “Listen Sir! I will give half my belongings to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I will pay him back four times as much” (Lk 19/8)

He knew he didn’t deserve any preferential treatment: actually he was surprised that Jesus invited himself to his house. “Zacchaeus hurried down and welcomed him with great joy” (Lk 19/6)

The Pharisees and bystanders began grumbling and condemning both Jesus and Zacchaeus. “This man has gone as a guest to the home of a sinner”! (Lk 19/7) The implication was that they were not sinners like this man Zacchaeus!...

They were good and respectable people.. They kept the law, Zacchaeus didn’t! That day salvation came to Zacchaeus, not to the Pharisees or to the bystanders! Why?

Salvation is a gift of God. He gives it to whomsoever he pleases.. No one can buy it. It is a gift to be accepted joyously and without a second thought, as Zacchaeus did.

True, Zacchaeus undertook to make restitution and give a lot in charity... but this was not to gain Jesus’ approval, or to make amends for his past misdeeds

Jesus had accepted him already in advance of the promised good deeds!

Whatever good Zacchaeus undertook was a sign of his gratefulness and loving readiness to do something to show his love for Jesus.

We do not become good people by doing good deeds. Our good deeds speak for themselves: they show up our goodness. Elsewhere Jesus said “every tree is known by the fruit it bears.. A good man brings good out of the treasure of his heart” (Lk 7/42 and 43)

The Sinful Woman in the House of Simon the Pharisee.(Lk 7/36-48) *Read the Text*

A Sinful woman – likely a prostitute - is approved by Jesus, while Simon, the pious Pharisee, is condemned!

- Simon was sure of himself, he counted on his good works, The woman wasn’t sure of anything except of her sins and wretched life!
- She was sure, however, of Gods love!
- She could not count on anything, save on Jesus’ love and acceptance.
- Pay attention to the words of Jesus to Simon the Pharisee: “I tell you, that the great love she has shown proves that her many sins have been forgiven?” (Lk /47)
- She never deserved to have her many sins forgiven, no!

- Her love was not cause of her sins to be forgiven, but only a sign of her gratitude to Jesus for forgiving her, her many sins.
- Even while she lived a life of sin, she had been loved by God and accepted by him as his daughter!
- It was that realization that changed her life.
- Her love for Jesus and the good deed she did by washing Jesus;' feet were only a manifestation of her gratitude for being forgiven.