

Loving Jesus

Jesus, in Matthew 22:37, asks us to love Him with our whole heart and soul and mind. Finally, in my old age, having discovered who He is, what He did, and how my future is in His hands, that doesn't seem to be an unreasonable requirement or prerequisite to salvation. Paul said that we are saved through grace by faith alone. But as John Calvin said, "Faith is never alone." By its very nature, faith in Jesus incorporates the Gospel in its entirety. This means that love of Jesus and living by His word to the full extent of our limited capabilities is what the Christian walk is all about.

As the absolute pinnacle of omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence, there isn't much that God doesn't know or can't do. Three things that He cannot do, of course, are that He can't learn, He can't lie, and He can't make you love Him. He gave us the God-like faculty of free will that provides us sovereignty over the many choices in our lives. Among these is the choice of whether or not to love Him. God cannot, by the nature of His choice in the manner of our creation, make us love Him. After giving us all we need to know about Him in the Scriptures, He left it for us to choose, and by that choice, to seal our destiny, which is to be either with or without Him. We are saved by faith in Him, but because faith and love in this case are so inexorably entwined, it is not possible to have a genuine one without the other.

At this very moment, just as I wrote this last sentence, it came to me as a revelation! I just expressed what I believe and, what I pray is the element that has been missing from my faith! I have accepted Jesus as my Savior for about three years. I firmly believe in the resurrection and I spend several hours each day reading the Bible, praying, listening to Biblical teaching tapes, thinking, writing, and trying hard to understand my mission in Christ. Because of all this, it would seem that I am "saved." Every Christian that I talk to says that I am saved. But I don't feel saved, and suddenly, as I write this, I believe that I know why.

I feel that I am one of those of whom Paul spoke in Corinthians I, 15:2, who believe in vain. That sentence flowed onto the paper, assisted by more than my very limited and failing mind, just as did the gnawing compulsion to write this paper in the first place. My problem, I just realized, is that I have failed to bring enough love for Jesus into my faith! It now seems clear to me, just as I have sensed and feared, that my faith is shallow and in vain. I know that Jesus is deserving of my love. At this moment, I don't know where I'm going with this, but I trust that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide me along this paper trail that I feel compelled to create, and that through these efforts I will find the fertile soil in which this love can begin to grow strong.

Why should I love Jesus when clearly much of the world hates Him and always has? What did He do, and who is He that He deserves such love? First of all, who was/is He? This I know. Jesus is God the Almighty as well as the Son of God. God is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit that operate as separate personages, even as they are a single Godhead. God is a singular plurality. This is a difficult concept to understand because we live in a 3-1/2 dimension world (we only comprehend half of the time dimension, that is from the past to the present, but not into the future) while God is in at least ten dimensions (which the cutting edge of science now recognizes as existing, and a great Biblical scholar, Moses Maimonides, made note of 1000 years ago). Careful analysis of the Old Testament reveals the plurality of God in a number of places. In Ecclesiastes 12:1, the English translation uses the word "Creator." However, in the original Hebrew the word Barrow for Creator is written in the plural. Genesis 1:26 says, "And God said let us make men in our image.....". This plurality of God has been mostly obscured in the English translation, it would seem, because the plural noun is followed by a singular verb (i.e., the Gods is) and the translator chose to "correct" this "error" in grammar. The fact that Jesus is one of the plural singularities of the total Godhead, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is well, but subtly, documented in the Old Testament, and is revealed in the New Testament. All of this is most thoroughly discussed and documented by Chuck Missler in a set of tapes called "The Trinity."

However, for quick reference, a reading of Isaiah 53, Psalms 21 and the Hebrew meanings of the names of the lineage from Adam through Noah, should strongly suggest, even to a skeptic, that Jesus is written of at least several times and actually very many times in the Old Testament, and therefore is not some “newcomer” who first enters the scene only in the New Testament. Once this fact is understood, it becomes easier to recognize that the sixty-six books of the Holy Bible, written by forty authors over several thousand years, is an integrated message system dictated by the Holy Spirit from outside the time dimension. This then becomes compellingly more evident as one grows to recognize the precise fulfillment of hundreds of prophecies and the existence of the incredible coding system within the text, both open as well as hidden, which no humans, even with the largest most advanced computers, could possibly create. Finally, with this well understood, one is inexorably led to the only possible conclusion, that is that the Holy Bible in its original text is truly the Word, the Truth, the Absolute Truth, the rock foundation of all existence.

Now, back to love. Before there can be love, it seems to me that there must be some understanding of, and intimacy with, the person to be loved, perhaps even a sense of gratitude, awe or respect. The understanding of, as well as the gratitude, awe and respect for, are fairly easy to acquire in the case of Jesus, with even a cursory understanding of His life and deeds. The intimacy part, however, is more difficult and seems to be possible only after a familiarity develops as a result of delving deeply into these other elements, and of course recognizing whom He was/is.

In understanding Jesus, it must be recognized that He was both God and man. As God, the Son aspect of this divinely plural singularity, He chose to humble Himself and become subject to pain, suffering, temptation, and the limitations of the fleshly body of man. Thus, He could walk among us, His creation, as one of His creation, delivering directly and in human terms, His message of love and redemption. Existing outside of time and space, our Creator knew from before the beginning of time, everything that His effort would cause, every thought and every action that each of us would have, from Adam to the end of time. Even though He gave us free will and choice, from His

perspective He could know everything that we would choose to do and think before it happened. He knew before time that, at this moment, I would be writing this and attempting to find my place in His universe. He also chose, before time, exactly where and what manners of intervention He would impose, including His brief journey into time and space as the man Jesus. Everything that He intended to do, including His birth as man through a virgin, His death by crucifixion, and His resurrection, were recorded hundreds of years in advance in the Old Testament. His message, the whole purpose of His coming, was then restated with greater clarity in the New Testament.

Why did the Lord choose to become man and to suffer for our sins? Wasn't this a convoluted, painful, impractical, unnecessary way to get His message to us, and to rid us of sin? As the omnipotent God, couldn't He have chosen some other, more sophisticated way to accomplish this? Given where the world had gone since then, the failure of any universal acceptance and acknowledgement of this effort, especially in recent time, and more importantly, the gross ghastly misunderstanding and perverted application of His message, one might easily conclude that His mission was a failure. Obviously, there is something wrong with that picture, these questions, and this conclusion. Nevertheless, it all seems reasonable from a secular sense, using human logic and reasoning.

It has been said that God acts in strange and mysterious ways, but that is only because we lack our Creator's intellect and His knowledge of the end from the beginning and all moves in between. He planned it all from before the beginning. He knew before creation that He would take on a human body and that's exactly what He did. He also knew exactly what the result would be. We know that He knew because He told us so very clearly in the Bible long before any of it happened. As one possible flicker of light that might be cast toward an answer to the question of why Jesus chose to become a man, I am reminded of a little analogy that Chuck Missler mentioned on one of his teaching tapes. It seems that when he was a small boy and wondering about the same question, he asked it of a wise old Christian. The man took him outside to where there was a busy ant colony, and as they were looking down on the activity, he said something like, "Do you see those ants down there? Now, if you really loved those ants and could do anything

you wanted, like God can, what do you think you might do in order to tell them what you wanted them to know?" After discussing various options, it becomes evident that becoming an ant was the kindest, most loving way in which to accomplish this, even though the risks were probably the greatest.

For the skeptic, I don't have clear compelling answers to these questions. No one has, unless the Holy Spirit opens ones eyes as He did mine, you can never know. Because my eyes were opened, while investigating the available facts, I was able to find the compelling unmistakable evidence from which to form a rock solid belief in the Bible and in the Resurrection. I know that Jesus played out a necessary scenario in God's overall plan from His Godly, all-knowing perspective. That is the key to everything. The realization that the Old and New Testaments are collectively the impeccably accurate inspired Word of God and, as such, are the fundamental and absolute truth, every word without exception in the original Greek and Hebrew. Having reached this conclusion, the mystery to me is not what is in the Bible, and the advent of Jesus on earth, but why so many find it so difficult to see and to understand what to me is now so evident and so thoroughly proven. Of course, it is equally strange to me why it took me so long to realize this truth.

Jesus became man in order to take away and pay for all of our sins, in order that those who believe in Him would have everlasting salvation. To non-believers, this sounds not only bizarre, but also absurd and foolish. Admittedly, from a strictly human perspective, it might seem that if this needed to be done at all, there would be a better way than through His own pain, suffering, humiliation and physical death. Jesus the man even asked the Father three times, on the eve of his humiliation, whether there was any other way; but there wasn't. Because I know what I know about the truth of Jesus, and because His whole story was foretold hundreds of years earlier in the Old Testament, I have no problem accepting the fact that there is a logic, an imperative that necessitated this manner of action, even though it may be beyond my ability to so comprehend. In other words, I trust that the Lord's judgment and common sense are superior to my own.

Now let us examine the awesome nature of what happened, in the context of love. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son; that whosoever believes in Him may not perish but have life everlasting” (John 3:16). Why is this His only begotten son? As God, He could have “begotten” any number of sons. After thinking about this, I have concluded something that I have not yet seen in any commentaries. God uses the vehicle of “Son-ship” to reveal Himself and walk among us because we are capable of relating to this as a specific, understandable, close relationship. But the original personage we now call Jesus was not a son in the sense of a normal father-son relationship. The Godly personage we call Jesus was/is God. He is and always was one of the Singular Plurality, one of the three Personages of the total singular God.

God could have simply “appeared” on earth in human, adult form, just as He did several other times, as recorded in the Old Testament. It would seem that He could have taken on the same tasks as teacher, prophet, healer, etc., starting as a man. Instead, He chose to be born and to grow into manhood in the normal mortal manner. This, of course, necessitated what has been called the “virgin” birth, with God, through the Holy Spirit, providing the father role in the “Immaculate Conception.” Thus, God became the “Father,” and the result of the conception, the “Son” Jesus. Now there existed on earth a human infant, growing into manhood, in which dwelled the spirit and soul of God.

But what does this have to do with love? A great deal, in my opinion, because to me it adds another dimension to His love and the sacrifice God committed on our behalf. With the Father, Son and Holy Spirit being collectively one single God, God literally tore Himself apart and sent one part of Himself, whom we now call Jesus, to the earth and to incredible suffering. It wasn’t a son in the human sense, a separate being, but God Himself who chose to perform this miraculous deed. That is God’s love, unconditional love. It was agape love.

Then came thirty years of growth from infancy to the beginning of His ministry; a long and frustrating period for this transcendent God to contain Himself in time and space, and in so limiting fleshly form. This was patient love.

Then came what must have been, from His human aspect, a very disheartening 3-1/2 year of ministry. Because, even with His awe-inspiring, incredible teaching, and thousands of healing miracles, He remained, for the most part, hated, hunted, stoned and not believed by the very leaders who claimed to be the ordained representatives and faithful followers of the same God. These were the “faithful” who failed to recognize Him even as He fulfilled the many prophecies foretold to be accomplished by Him whom they had waited hundreds of years to witness. It was these, perhaps no more than a dozen of the “spiritual leaders” who conspired and prevailed upon the Romans to have Him crucified. This, too, was patient, selfless love and unrequited love.

The climax of this love journey was His trial, torture and crucifixion, which, of course, He could have stopped at any time. The description of this event, as presented in the New Testament, lacks the detail, which is significant in any assessment of the actual love He felt, and the price He paid for our salvation. Consider one curious aspect of the recorded events after His resurrection. First, at the tomb, when Mary, who loved Him and worshipped Him and knew Him well, mistook Him for the gardener, until he spoke her name and thus she recognized His voice. Then, on the road to Emmanus, He met Cleopas and another disciple. The three walked and talked for 7 miles and neither one recognized Him during this entire time. Later, at dinner, when He broke bread, they finally recognized Him, probably because of the nail holes in his wrists. Again, when He appeared in the room with ten of the apostles, they didn't recognize Him until He displayed His wounds. One might conclude from this that He didn't look the same as He had when they knew Him before the crucifixion. Putting this observation in the context of Isaiah 50:6, God speaks “I have given my body to the strikers, my cheeks to them that plucked them; I have turned away my face from them that rebuked me, and spit upon me.” It should be noted also that it was the Roman soldiers that beat Him. The highest level of this type of punishment given by Jewish law was “40 strokes minus 1.” The Romans had no such “humane” rules. Additionally, Isaiah 52:14 makes note that “As many were astounded at thee; His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men....” Read this and Isaiah 53 and it is evident that the prophet

is describing Jesus and His incredible torture and disfigurement “more than any man,” hundreds of years before Jesus was born! Psalm 22 also describes the crucifixion and the suffering in the words of Jesus as He hung on the cross, words written hundreds of years before His birth and hundreds of years before crucifixion was even invented!

Thus, we find that this process of intense torture, disfigurement and death on the cross, this ultimate love sacrifice which Jesus allowed and of which He knew since before the beginning of time, consisted of much more pain, torment and suffering than one might at first conclude, without benefit of the more remote and prophetic passages in the Old Testament. They not only beat Him severely, but they also plucked out His beard and “His visage was marred more than any man.” This explains why He wasn’t later recognized by even His closest friends! Knowing what was coming, He the man, prayed the night before, asking the Father three times if there was some other way. According to Luke 27:44, His emotional agony then was such that He sweat blood as He prayed. Remember that He could have, on His own, stopped this at any time. However, His consultations with the Father confirmed that there was no other way to provide salvation for His beloved mankind. He, therefore, proceeded to permit His own prolonged torture and execution. How does one describe such love? It is certainly beyond human capacity to understand, let alone emulate. Perhaps only the love of a parent for his or her children can begin to approach this.

Again one might ask if there wasn’t some other way to “save” mankind that didn’t involve such strain and pain on God’s part. Obviously, in the human context, almost anyone can compose a dozen scenarios that would do the job. But none of them would, or certainly God would have chosen one. How about this as a seemingly simply way for Him to get the message out? God could come out of the clouds, say once every month or so, and shout to the whole world. He might say something like, “Hey, you turkeys, this is God and I am watching you! You had better behave or you’ll all end up in the oven on Thanksgiving Day!” It would seem that this would certainly fill the churches and keep the jails empty. But that would, in essence, take away all choice and turn mankind into automatons. It would be like giving students the answer sheet along with the exam. The

result would provide no evidence whatsoever as to the learning that the student had achieved. He gave us what we need to know Him and to love Him. He also gave us the answers, but everything is, and properly so, in the Textbook, and one has to study that Text in order to find them. Of course, He also gave us the choice, our free will. Thus, we can choose to learn the truth about Him and ourselves from the Textbook that He personally wrote and autographed, or we can choose to ignore it. He already paid the price of our salvation on the cross. All we have to do is believe in what the cross represents and have faith in Him who hung there and who ascended to heaven.

Unfortunately, many that do read the Book will still not learn or believe. This is because of a chicken-and-egg type of dilemma. The Lord in the Person of the Holy Spirit is always available to anyone seeking the Truth of the Word. And only through His assistance can the Word be really understood. One must with sincerity ask for His help, consciously or unconsciously. Thus, it would seem that some level of belief or desire to believe must already be in place before the fullness of the Truth, which leads to faith and love, can manifest. One must have the egg before the chicken can hatch.

A most splendid analogy, which better explains the role of the Holy Spirit, is provided by Chuck Missler. The hologram is an unusual three-dimensional photograph that is created using a laser as a light source to activate ordinary photographic film. This type of photography provides several strange and unique qualities. One of these is that the resulting picture is a meaningless jumble of shapes when viewed in any light except the very laser light with which the photo was taken. Only when viewed with the same laser light will the picture image be coherent. The same is true for the Bible. Although forty authors put the ink on the paper, it was the “ghost” written by the Holy Spirit, and only through His light can it be read and really understood.

The Lord loves us all. He has made this very clear. However, He has rules, firm rules. You can be with Him forever or be turned away from Him forever. Your choice. He asks only that you believe in His resurrection, that you love Him, and that you put your complete faith and trust in Him. Think about it. That’s all He wants. He’s God. He can

have whatever He wants. He wants you, but only if you want Him, and on His terms. It is entirely your choice. He made the first move, on the cross. The next move is yours. He won't choose you unless you choose Him. If you choose otherwise, you had better be certain of what it is that you are doing, because once the flesh dies there is no mind to change anymore, but there is an eternity which may be filled with regrets.

Well, looking back at what I have written, I seem to have flailed away in many directions trying to deal with this subject of loving Jesus. I think that I have made a strong case regarding His love for all of us, but what about my love for Him? Near the beginning of this, I noted my realization of my own deficiency, but did any of this enhance my state or better point my way? It may have. I could not hold back my tears as I made note of the evidence regarding the torture and mutilation that our dear Lord suffered on my behalf. That gets me to the question: "What is love?" Are gratitude, respect, awe, interest, concern, thirst for understanding of, desire for closeness to; are these all somehow related to love? Or might they collectively be manifestations of actual love, as He would have us feel? I don't know. But I sure hope so, because that seems to be where I am. He is on my mind, in the context of one or more of these forms, a great deal of the time.

I pray that with the help of the Holy Spirit my understanding and love of Jesus will mature, and the strength and fullness of my faith will be such as to remove all doubt from my mind. I also pray with equal sincerity that you too will find something here of value, something that will spark your interest and desire to seek the Lord and confirm your love for Him