

MORE THAN A FEELING

JOY

PART 1

Obedience and Glorification

READ: ROMANS 15:7-13

INTRODUCTION

God's ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts. This means that He doesn't get joy from the same things that we do either. His joy comes from us living obedient lives and serving Him with all of our heart, mind, and strength. His Son came to this earth and gave us the perfect example of what it means to be obedient to the Father, even unto death. (Philippians 2:8) This obedience is one of the main ways that we can also bring joy to God.

Jesus said that if we love Him, we should follow His commands in John 14:15. This means that we not only get joy out of our obedience to Him but also that we show Him and prove that we love Him through the practical application of following His commandments. It doesn't make Him love us more but it does show that we care more about what He has to say and His direction rather than that of the world. The enemy is prowling around like a lion seeking whom he can devour and when we do not follow God's commands, it makes it much easier for the enemy to catch us.

Our obedience regarding God's commands also gives God glory. Our entire purpose for being is to bring God and give God all the glory that is due Him. That means that we will obey His commands and be a people that glorifies Him through our works. Many feel that this is works based salvation but, in reality, it is showing our love for what God has done by being loyal and faithful to Him and His Word. This is not a salvific issue but one of love and obedience.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean that Gentiles are now able to be saved through Jesus Christ?
2. If obedience and glorification bring God joy, how can we better make sure that our lives emulate the will of the Father?
3. How does obedience show love?
4. Where do we find the “commands” that we are to follow? Why is it so important to dwell in the Word of God?
5. Obedience can be hard when we feel like we are adults that don’t need rules. What are some of the reasons God has given us some of the commands that He has given to us to follow?

WRAP UP

God’s joy is not predicated on our actions. His emotions are not subject to us. We have some influence over whether or not He takes joy in us and our lives however. There is always room for improvement and we should always be looking to follow Him more closely. A close, intimate relationship with God is the most important thing that we should pursue in this life.

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LOVE

PART 2

The Greatest Love

READ: JOHN 15:9-17

INTRODUCTION

Jesus commands us to abide in His love. This is seemingly simple in that we already have a great reason to love Jesus. When we look deeper at it though we see that love requires us to abide in Him and in His commands. We find joy in His love and we also find joy in obeying His commands (as we saw in the Joy study). But, ultimately, we see that His love for us is the greatest love there can be because of what He sacrificed for us - His life.

Verse 13 says that, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends". Jesus has moved from just being a Savior (as if that wasn't enough) into a role of friendship. This is a powerful statement that should give us a whole new view of God's love for us. We are not deserving of His friendship or His life, and yet He gave them both to us. He chose to die for the sake of His friends and to give us an opportunity to live for eternity with Him.

There is a small stipulation to this friendship. He calls us friends when we do whatever He commands of us. That is a small sacrifice on our part when you think about the amazing gift that He is giving us in return for our obedience. He commands us to bear fruit (Galatians 5:22) and says that it is so important that we love one another. It is important that we love one another because that is proof that we have the Holy Spirit in our hearts. His love truly is the greatest love there is.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do we abide in Jesus' love? What does Scripture say about those who abide in Christ?
2. What are the best things, in your opinion, about the love of God? How can we better emulate those in our own lives?
3. Why do you think that sacrificing yourself is the greatest form of love? Do you think that He just means physically or are there other ways to sacrifice for your friends?
4. Why did Jesus choose us? Why does He call us friends? (What are the requirements to be His friend?)
5. Read Galatians 5:22. What aspect of love needs the most work in your own life? How can you cultivate that area better? What aspect are you good at?

WRAP UP

God's love is undeserved by us. We have done nothing to earn it. In fact, we have done plenty to earn His judgment and punishment. It is important that we understand that, not so we can beat ourselves up, but so that we can understand and appreciate His love for us more than ever. When we do that, we will be able to start loving those around us as Jesus loves us. Remember, they will know us by our love for one another.

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HATE

PART 3

Re-examining the emotion

READ: HOSEA 9:10-17

INTRODUCTION

There are many ways to view the word “hate” when looking at its relationship to God. His ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts. (Is. 55:8-9) This means that we cannot look at the word with our human eyes and understand what it means. God’s hatred has got many different dimensions and is not restricted to a singular emotion or feeling. Make no mistake though, God does hate and that hate is directed at sin and sinners.

In this passage of Hosea, we see that God will not tolerate sin or sinners forever. His love is patient (see 1 Corinthians 13) and His people were taking advantage of that long-suffering love that He had for them. Specifically, in the context of this passage, it seems that He had reached the end of His patience for their actions once they started to offer their children up in sacrifices to false gods. God is a Holy and just God, and He does not tolerate those who kill innocents.

What is most important about understanding God’s hate is that He gives many opportunities to escape His wrath. (1 Corinth. 10:13) In His sovereignty, God will eventually allow people to have exactly what they want in regards to their sin. Often, people will fight against God and say they want nothing to do with Him and so, eventually, He gives them what they want. Once that happens, once a person decides finally to never seek God or His forgiveness, that person is now going to be driven out of the house of God. (Hosea 15-16) It is never something that is good and God does not enjoy it but, make no mistake, God is holy and He is righteous. Though He doesn’t enjoy hate, God’s hate is justified and we can give Him glory because He hates righteously.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read Isaiah 55:8-9. In regard to God's hate, how does this passage read differently than we are used to? How can we better understand how God can hate, but do so in a holy way?
2. We don't often use the word "hate" when describing the attributes of God. What is a good way to describe God's hate to someone who may be struggling with the concept?
3. When we look at God's love being patient, how often do you think we take advantage of that patience?
4. Read Galatians 6:7-10. How does this passage relate to God's hate? How does it say a person can avoid coming under the wrath of God's hate?
5. We often sin against God and use the excuse of "falling" into that sin. How does 1 Corinthians 10:13 refute that way of thinking? How can we better avoid the trap of sin?

WRAP UP

God's emotions are more complex than ours. But, we should not try and excuse God's emotions for Him. He is righteous and holy and any emotion that He has is completely, perfectly justified. That includes His hate. His hate is reserved for sinners and their sin and so there is a simple solution to not experiencing God's hate. Don't sin. The only way to see God more clearly and experience His grace and mercy is to turn to Jesus and seek Him above all others.

MORE THAN A FEELING

ANGER

PART 4

God's glory through Wrath

READ: REVELATION 19:1-5

INTRODUCTION

In Revelation chapter 19 we are at the end of God's wrath being poured out on the world for its evil deeds. (Look back over the previous few chapters for more details) It is amazing (even if hard to comprehend) that God's people in Heaven immediately react to His judgements with praise. It changes the way we should view God and His wrath when we place His perfect holiness in its proper place in our hearts and minds.

Often, we feel uncomfortable around something like the wrath, or anger, of God. This should not be the case however because we see throughout Scripture that God's holiness cannot tolerate sin whatsoever. That means that when He deals with sin and evil, He is to be glorified. We cannot let our imperfect emotions try to dilute the perfect wrath of God because it makes us "feel better" about Him. He does not need our defense when He acts out His judgement of a fallen world.

In the destruction of God's enemies, our response should always be to lift up His name in glory. He deals out justice to evildoers and we can be encouraged by that. His path is narrow and we can be encouraged by that. Perfection is the standard and through His Son, dying on the cross, we have been forgiven and made righteous. We may not understand God's wrath from an earthly, human perspective but, we can see how good He truly is in His perfect anger towards evil and sin. Through that, we can be truly thankful that He shows us grace and mercy and love as His children.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Does it make you uncomfortable that God is praised after destroying much of the world? Why? How can we better present the wrath of God to people who may be uncomfortable with it?
2. What are some other passages that show God being glorified in His anger? Why is it important for us to understand that He is perfect in ALL His ways?
3. Regarding God's wrath and anger, why is it so important that He never changes? How is His anger different than ours? How can we align our anger with His?
4. There is a difference in praising God than in taking pleasure in the destruction of humans. Why is it important to be sensitive to this difference?
5. How does God's love for us intertwine with His anger? Where in His anger can we take encouragement?

WRAP UP

On the surface, we often will look at God's anger and feel that it is extreme. From humanistic perceptions it may be too extreme. However, when we look at His anger Biblically and through the lens of a Holy and perfect God, it is impossible to ignore the fact that if He truly is God then He must be able to deal with evil. On top of that, if He is a good God and a loving God, then He has to eventually deal with evil. That means that His anger, while intense, is necessary for Him to cleanse the world from unrighteousness.

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SORROW

PART 5

Grieving the Lord

READ LUKE 13:34-35

INTRODUCTION

When we look at this short passage, (cross reference with Matthew 23:37-39) we see Jesus lamenting over the city of Jerusalem. Specifically, He is sorrowful for the inhabitants thereof. The sorrow of God can be misunderstood very easily from a human perspective. We tend to think that sorrow implies a regret or something that happened that was out of our control. This is not the case with a Holy and perfect God, however. He is not lamenting over Jerusalem because of His inability to “gather them up” but, rather, their unwillingness to be gathered by Him.

Throughout the Old Testament, we see God reaching out to, and working for, Israel. He loves His people and desires them to turn to Him above and before any other gods. (Deut. 7:6, Joshua 23:12-13) We also see that He is a jealous God. (Ex. 20:5) He desires His people to give their whole hearts to Him and Him alone. This was not the pattern though and Israel often chose their false gods over Him. Not only that, they also killed all of the prophets that God did send to them to try and correct their path. (1 Thess. 2:14-15) They actively tried to get away from God's correction because, often, correction is painful or uncomfortable. (Heb. 12:11)

Jesus, showing His sorrow for the city that was often reached out to and often rejected Him, shows a couple of things to us in our own sorrow. First, He shows us that what grieves Him should be what grieves us. There is a lost and broken world that is in desperate need of a Savior and every minute there are people going to an eternity of separation from God. That should move us to sorrow and action. Second, Jesus exemplifies the idea that it is not wrong to weep for those who we love. At sometime in life, we will experience the loss of a loved one or one of our close friends turning to a path that leads to destruction. These things should be grieved and they can rock us to our core. Jesus has experienced grief as well and it is so important to know that He can relate to us in our earthly sorrow. He is a God that understands what we go through. He is personal and cares for us.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the primary ways we can misunderstand the sorrow of God? Why is it not a good thing to misunderstand? How can we change our perspective?
2. Does God ever regret? Does He ever get bitter? Does He ever feel hopeless about a situation? How can we best model our emotions after God's when we look at His response to His people?
3. Why were the children of Israel so hesitant to allow God to "gather them up"? How can we learn from their mistakes and allow God to protect us?
4. Read Psalm 91. How does that chapter show how we can move on and heal from sorrow?
5. When someone says, "Break my heart for what breaks yours", what does that mean? What breaks God's heart? Why should we be broken over those things too? What can we do to help?

WRAP UP

The emotions of God are certainly not like most of the emotions that we have in practice. They are real emotions though and He has given us these emotions because they can be wonderful when they are brought into submission to His will and direction. He has set for us the perfect example through His Son, Jesus Christ and we can look to Him to be our guide through an area that affects us every day. In His love, we can be broken for the things that matter and we can love the way He loves. We are able to show righteous anger and even hate the things that are not Godly. When we allow Him to direct our emotions, we are able to have great joy and see our love for Him, and others, grow.