

LOVE WITHOUT CAUSE

Deuteronomy 7:6-9

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His people, His treasured possession. *The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.* But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath He swore to your ancestors that He brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; He is the faithful God, keeping His covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His Commandment.

Seeing how tomorrow is Valentine's Day, I suppose I should say a few words about love. Now, I will leave the romantic love to poets and dreamers. I propose instead to tackle a much more profound type of love: the love we have for God and, more importantly, the love God has for us. In order to do this, I want to introduce a subtle point suggested by the ancient Greeks. According to the wisdom of the Greeks, all love is a form of weakness and imperfection; that is all love is essentially trying to compensate for some perceived lack. Now, before you go and dismiss this thought as mere cynicism, I want you to think about it with me for a moment because I believe there is *some* truth to the claim. After all, why do we love anyone? If we were honest, we would have to admit that what we love in others is precisely what is lacking in ourselves. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Opposites do attract. In fact, the best partnership, whether it be a marriage or friendship, is when a couple plays to each other's strengths and makes up for each other's weaknesses. The imperfect in me loves the perfect in you and vice versa, and together we challenge each other to be better versions of ourselves. I believe that about summarizes every earthly relationship from marital love to parental love to friendship love.

Extending this thought into the realm of the Divine, it is easy to see why we love God. God is perfect and complete in Himself, and we are imperfect beings. The imperfection in me loves the perfection of God. And since God's perfection is constant, I am better version of myself for knowing Him. God's perfection inspires me to strive beyond myself, to rise above myself, and reach a higher level of existence. Christ asks us, "to love God with all our heart" (Matt. 22:37), and here we do well to remember that 'heart'

does not refer to a particular muscle in our body, but rather refers to all the forces of our body, our entire self. To love God with all our 'heart' is to love Him unconditionally with every fiber of our beings. Now what this means in practical terms is that everything we do in this life should be done in relationship to this love right down to the smallest detail. If a person sleeps at night, goes to the gym to workout in the morning, labors at a profession during the day, and hangs out with friends in the evening, it should all be done for the sole purpose of contemplating God in body, soul, mind and spirit. The commandment to love God, then, is a commandment to channel all our passions into the one grand passion of knowing God. Love of God is the passion that includes all passions, the love of loves that informs every thought, every decision, every motion.

Our love for God is easy enough to understand. But what's much harder to understand is why God should ever love us. If we accept the ancient wisdom that love is defined by imperfection, as a perceived lack or weakness, then how can a perfect God love at all? After all, if God loved because He perceived something missing in Himself then He would not be God, right? We proclaim God to be eternal without change or need or deficiency. Therefore, our worldly need for love and companionship does not apply to God at all. God doesn't need us as we need Him. So, whatever do we mean when we say, "God is love" or "God loves us" (1 John 4:7-12)? Our Old Testament reading says it all. God proclaimed to His people of old that He did not love them because they were great or numerous or wonderful, they were none of those things, He loved them...well...for no reason at all. That's what the passage essentially says. God loved them for no earthly reason. And this kind of love is unique to God. God is the only Being who can love without reason or cause. No human can ever claim to love like this. We might say we love others in a selfless way, and certainly a lot of romantic poetry and literature have been written to that effect, but in the end, all human love has a touch of self-interest. At the very least, we love others because we love how *we feel* when we love them. But God's love is different. It is of the purist kind. God does not love us for

what we can do for Him nor does He derive any personal benefit from loving us. Only God can say that He loves us for simply being us; not for *what* we are, but for *who* we are. There are no material or physical factors to God's love. It is a love that exists above and beyond any earthly fact or circumstance. In this way, God's love is an expression of strength not weakness, perfection not imperfection. His love lacks nothing; instead, it gives rather than receives. By the very fact that God loves us we become lovable. What's more, it is God's love that makes our love even possible. God's love is the paradigm—we love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19). In this way, every form of love on earth is an extension of God's love, an imitation of God Himself. God has no equal, no counterpart, and there is no reason for why He loves us, which is to say His love is unreasonable and unconditional. But if you think about it this means God's love never changes. If there is no reason for why He loves us then He has no reason to change. And this permanence gives us peace. In the end, we don't deserve it, we don't earn it, in truth we barely understand it, but we are meant to enjoy it. All of life is a eulogy of love, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, where God's love is celebrated, perhaps imitated, but never duplicated. Amen.

In Christ,

Jeremy H. Mills