

MOODY DISTANCE LEARNING

God is Love

Greg Wheatley:

Welcome once again to Radio School of the Bible. This program is a ministry of the Center for External Studies at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. I'm Greg Wheatley, and this quarter we're studying together God's will for your life. Our instructor is Dr. Bill Thrasher. He is professor of Bible and Theology in the Graduate School at Moody Bible Institute. Together, we're understanding more and more about what it means to follow God, and not just to look for the mechanics of His will, but really to seek Him and understand who He is.

Well, I hope you're being encouraged, even as I am, as we listen to the teaching and study together with Dr. Bill Thrasher. So let's get right to it today as we continue to talk about some of these wonderful attributes of God and how they help us in knowing God's will.

Dr. Bill Thrasher:

Yes. We've maintained that a person who wants to know God's will, Greg, must have a greater interest in knowing God than in knowing God's will, and that knowing God's will is a byproduct or overflows from the truth of knowing God. We've looked at a variety of truths that God has revealed about Himself.

We've seen that God is a person and that it is God's will that we develop a personal relationship with Him. That God is a spirit; it is God's will that we learn to worship Him in spirit and in truth. That God is immutable and unchanging; it is God's will that we build our life around He who cannot change. That God is eternal, and that is to be the guiding principle in regard to God's will, to live for those things which are eternal.

We also saw that God is omniscient, that He knows the solution to every problem. He knows, in a sense, what is best for us as we – the definition of God's will, that God's will is exactly what you would desire, if you knew all the facts. That God is omnipresent, that it is God's will to cultivate a conscious enjoyment of God's presence. That God is wise and He wants to give us the gift of His wisdom. And that God is omnipotent, that He wants us to experience His power. And that God is holy, that He wants us to understand and reflect in our life the holiness of God.

Today, the wonderful attribute of God's love.

Now, I want to start out by reading a couple of Scriptures. Both are Old Testament Scriptures, but they give us a wonderful insight into the love of God. Zion says, speaking of God's people, "The Lord has forsaken me and the Lord has forgotten me."

But God's answer, "Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. Behold, I've inscribed you on the palm of my hands. Your walls are continually before me." He's saying that His love can be likened to the love of a mother for her child that she's nursing - but it's much greater, it's much greater, it's much more dependable. He says He's inscribed you on the palm of His hands.

Also, we read in the Book of Hosea, Hosea 11, "When Israel was a youth I loved him. Out of Egypt I call my son. The more they called him, they called him, the more they went from him. They kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning incense to idols. Yet it is I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them in my arms, but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with the cords of a man, with bonds of love, and I became to them as one who lifts the yoke from their jaws, and I bent down and fed them."

And then as God talking to His wayward people, "How can I give up – how can I give you up, O, Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O, Israel? My heart is turned over within me. All my compassions are kindled. I will not execute my fierce anger, I will not destroy you forever, or again, for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath." He's saying that, what, it's because of God's great love that He does not destroy us in our sin, but He fulfills His purpose for His children.

You see, God has a will for your life. You may have strayed from God, but any time a person has surrendered to God, God has a will for their life. God is a source of all love, and God wants you to know His love. You say can we get off balance in talking about the love of God? Well, certainly we could get off balance, but not if it's rightly talked about. You can never overemphasize God's love, because, see, God's love is balanced out by the other attributes of God.

In other words, we said God is eternal. Well, then what? Then, God has an eternal love. That's why Jeremiah would say, "I've loved you with an everlasting love." There's no beginning. There's no end. His love is infinite. That's why God can love you as if you were the only person in the world and not take away from His love for anybody else. God's love is infinite. God's love is holy.

We talked last time about God being holy. Well, because God's love is holy, it means He will discipline you out of love when your life is wayward, to bring you back, in a sense, to the experience of His will. God's love is faithful. That's why it says you can't be separated from His love.

See, no, you can't overemphasize the love of God, as long as you keep it in balance with the other attributes. But isn't it wonderful to know that God's heart just turns over His compassion for you? That He has you, what, written on the palms of His hands, inscribed on the palms of His hands, as we see there in Isaiah 49. God loves you.

Now, what does God desire you to know in regard to pursuing His will? He wants to overwhelm you with His love. In fact, I think that's one of the most important things for you to trust God for, to trust Him to overwhelm you with His love. Because, you know, in regard to God's will, the most important thing in God's economy is love. We read that in 1 Corinthians 13. It says, you know, apart from love, it doesn't matter what sacrifice you make or what spiritual gift you have or what knowledge you have or what oratorical ability you have. It's all vain, it's all nothing apart from love.

And God also tells us that we love because He first loved us. And so the most important thing to know in regard to God's love, is God's love for you. Then and only then can you be a vessel of His love. So ask God to overwhelm you with His love.

You know, I remember one year, literally asking God for that: Lord, overwhelm me with your love, because I came to what I just told you. I said, okay, I guess love is the most important thing, and that seems to be the thing that God is most interested in, but it seems like for me to grow in love and to be a vessel of love, whatever that means, is to know God's love for me.

So I asked God, "Lord, would you overwhelm me with your love?" And as I did that, familiar passages began to open up. Passages like Romans 5, and I think this passage tells us a lot, as familiar as it may be to some of you. It says that while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.

God wants us to know that He loves us when you feel helpless, when you feel, in the words of this passage here in Romans 5, when you not only feel helpless, but when you feel ungodly and when you know that you're a sinner. And also, it says He loved us even while we were His enemies. If you're God's child, you're not His enemy anymore, but God wants you to know that His love is not because of something in you, that's the reason He set it upon you. But He set it upon you because, what, because He is love, not conditioned upon your response to it. You see, God wants to overwhelm you with His love.

Now, how do you know that you're beginning to be overwhelmed with the love of God? One thing is that when you sense He loves you in the way no one else ever can or will. You know, in this passage it says, "For one will hardly die for a righteous man, though perhaps for the good man, someone would even dare to die." But God being better than that demonstrates His own love toward us and while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. God loves you in the way no one else ever can or will.

You see, as you seek God's will, even the best of relationships can frustrate you, if you ultimately look to that to be the source – your ultimate source of your love. If you look to anything to be the ultimate source of fulfillment, you're gonna get frustrated and it's gonna hinder you from knowing – knowing God's will. God wants you to know that He's better than the best of men.

He also wants you to know that His timing is perfect, as we've said before. God's timing – see, sometimes God's will presupposes that you, what, must wait upon Him. In fact, when God has something special, almost always He will decree waiting to be prior to Him giving you that good gift. God wants to overwhelm you with His love.

Well, you say if God's love is unconditional, does that mean it doesn't matter how I live? Of course – of course it matters how you live. See, God loves you just in the way a parent loves a child. A parent can love a rebellious child, but that rebellious child is not necessarily experiencing the love of the parent in the way the parent wants to give it to that child. So that's the way it is with God. God loves you, but He wants you, what, under His authority, so that He can do for you what He wants to do for you.

I think in closing, we'll look at a prayer in Ephesians 3, and there the apostle Paul says, "For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, for whom every family in heaven and earth derives its name." And as he prays, he asks God to give us something. He says that he would grant you – there's nothing wrong with asking God to give you something. In fact, most of the prayers in Scripture are prayers of asking. Certainly there's the emphasis upon praise and thanksgiving to be mixed with our asking, but there's nothing inherently wrong with asking that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your heart through faith.

And so that's the first part of his prayer, that you would be strengthened with power through His spirit in the inner man so that Christ would control you. Christ longed to control your life. Why does He want to control your life? We read further in the prayer and we see why. "That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge and that you may be filled up to the fullness of God.

You see, God wants you under His control that He can love you. You know, I can say this. God in His love has given me things that I wasn't even wise enough to ask for. God in His love has protected me from things that I craved at given points of time. And all I can do now is thank Him and praise Him for what He didn't give me, and also thank Him and praise Him for what He has given me.

Now, that's true wherever you find yourself today. God – will you open your life up to God's control? And you say, "Lord Jesus, I want to experience your love. I want you to love me in all the dimensions of your love." It requires you, what, surrendering your life to the Lord so that you can know, what, his loving purpose for your life.

Greg Wheatley:

Well, thank you, Dr. Thrasher. As we conclude today's broadcast on Radio School of the Bible, our hope is that you're learning more and more about what it means to get to know God on an intimate level. You may have been a Christian for many years, and yet some of these truths are striking you for the first time, and that's a good thing. And we're thankful for that and hope that you'll continue to stay with us and benefit from these teachings as we continue.

Our instructor this quarter is Dr. Bill Thrasher. He is professor of Bible and Theology in the graduate school at Moody Bible Institute. Thank you for joining us on Radio School of the Bible. My name is Greg Wheatley, and we'll look forward to the next time we get together, right here on Radio School of the Bible.

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