

GOD INCARNATE
The Fullness of Christ's Deity
 The Love of God

Philip Yancey Story

Philip Yancey, in his book *The Jesus I Never Knew*, told of his experience taking care of a large salt-water aquarium. As you can imagine, taking care of a large salt-water aquarium is no easy task because salt-water fish require precise levels of things like nitrates and ammonia. You basically have to run a portable chemical laboratory to take care of them. He said it required constantly pumping in enough vitamins, antibiotics, sulfa drugs, and enzymes to grow a rock! As well as filtering the water through glass fibers and charcoal, and exposing it to ultraviolet light. There's a whole list of things required to maintain an aquarium like that. A constant chore that demanded him to be there and constantly.

And he said, "You would think, in view of all the energy expended on their behalf, that the fish would at least be grateful[!]" Or even get used to him being around. But it wasn't so. Every time his shadow loomed above the tank, the fish would swim for cover into the nearest shell or behind the nearest rock. The only emotion they showed him was fear. He further said, "Although I opened the lid and dropped in food on a regular schedule, three times a day, they responded to each visit as a sure sign of my designs to torture them. I could not convince them of my true concern... To change their perceptions, I began to see, would require a form of incarnation [my becoming like them]."^{vi}

Paul Harvey Story

In another familiar account, every year on the radio, Paul Harvey retold a similar story about a farmer who struggled to believe what the churches preached every Christmas – the incarnation; that God became man. So rather than think himself a hypocrite, he stayed home one Christmas Eve. But shortly after his family left for church, he started hearing an irregular thumping sound on the picture window. And when he went to the window, he noticed tiny, shivering sparrows, attracted to the evident warmth inside, beating in vain against the glass. Touched, the farmer bundled up and trudged through the snow to open the barn door and turn the light on for them.

He tried various tactics to get them into the warm barn: circling behind the birds and trying to drive them towards the barn, tossing a trail crumbs, and then just leaving them alone. Everything he did seemed to frighten them and leave them confused. And as he stared at them, he thought: "*If only I could become a bird – one of them – just for a moment. Then I wouldn't frighten them. Then I would speak their language and so show them the way to warmth and safety.*" At the same moment, another thought hit him like lightning: He had just grasped the principle of the incarnation. Just then, he heard the church bells ring in town, cutting through the snow, and he sank to his knees before God in thanks.

Both of these stories break down and don't nearly do justice to the incarnation but they do lead our hearts and our minds in the right direction as we reflect upon the wonder of our Savior's birth tonight. John 1:14 says, the Word became flesh – God became a man – and dwelt among us out of great loving-compassion for us. And it's **God's love** that I want us to focus on tonight.

If you're just joining us for the night or visiting, this Christmas we've been lifting our thoughts and steadying our nerves and strengthening our hearts at the end of this wild ride of a year by **studying the**

attributes of God. And an attribute is just a part of who God is – something that intrinsic to His very nature, and being – and the love of God is one them.

But what may be a little different about this study is that we're studying God's attributes in light of the incarnation. Colossians 2:10 says Christ is the **fullness of Deity in bodily form**. Hebrews 1:3 tells us that He is **the reflection and radiance of God's glory, even the exact imprint of His being**. Jesus Himself said while He was on earth that **if you've seen Him, you've seen the Father** (John 14:9). I guess you could say we've been testing this Christmas by studying the attributes of God and then focusing on the incarnation, seeing some of those attributes in Jesus Christ's life.

So far we've studied some of the cloud-level-to-us attributes like His omnipotence and incomprehensibility. But tonight we look at something much more simple. The attribute of love.

I. THE LOVE OF GOD.

This attribute is important for us study because for one, many people today, are like the fish and the birds from the opening stories. For many people, even religious people, fear is the only or dominant emotion that arises when contemplating the thought of God. And fear of God is a good thing and the beginning of wisdom, the Bible says, but it should not stop there. Secondly, many have a God in mind that is far removed from this world, distant, displeased with everything and apathetic towards it. And because of the theory of evolution, many believe time and chance are behind the operation of the universe, and not a loving God. If that's the case, we have much to fear!

But according to the reality of the incarnation, fear and apathy and time and chance couldn't be further from the truth. **It proves that God is love.** And that He is more approachable than many think. And that He is so involved in it that He entered this world Himself, living by the cold and harsh rules of it all like we do to reach us.

In the Scriptures, there are only 3 terms used as these sort of **comprehensive descriptions** of God. God is **Spirit** (John 4:24), God is **light** (1 John 1:5), and God is **love** (1 John 4:8). Of course, by this, we certainly don't mean to say that God is *only* these things, like love – He is holy and just too – but there is still this sense in which to say that God is love is like saying that this is a supreme virtue of His nature, **a qualifying way to describe God's motives in all He does**. To the early Christian culture, love became the dominant virtue because He is love. You'll find it first in the list of fruit of the Spirit in Galatians. Corinthians says, without love, we are nothing. The apostle John said if we don't love, we don't know God (1 John 4:8). Love for God and love for people are evidence of salvation. Jesus said love is the fulfillment of the Law – if you love your neighbor you fulfill the Law (Mt. 22:36-40; Rom. 13:8-10). Faith, hope and love abide these three, but the greatest of these is love (1 Cor. 13:13). Love is definitely a preeminent and distinguished virtue.

When it comes to the love of God, we're not just talking about affection or emotion but **the free choice of God to give sacrificially of Himself. God is constantly giving of Himself** in love.

* **The love of God is His free choice to continually giving of Himself to others.**

When He chose to create this world and everything we know, He was making a decision to constantly give of Himself to it and His creations. One theologian wrote that to satisfy His love, all creation has been formed.ⁱⁱ **He is love by nature and by nature is constantly bestowing and imparting of Himself to us**. He is where life comes from. He is where everything we need comes from. It's Him, holding all things together and sustaining it. He is always, never-ceasing to give of Himself. Everyone and everything is dependent on Him and His love for its existence. All things

are from Him and through Him by His love. (Rom. 11:36). Love presides over the operations of the universe.

But it's not as though love was started when Creation was created. This has forever been **the structure of His being**.ⁱⁱⁱ **Infinite love has always existed between the Persons of the Godhead:** The Father and Son and Holy Spirit have always in the most worthy sense loved and have been loving each other. Only a Trinitarian God (1 God in 3 Persons) can explain relationships in this life. A monotheistic God never can. For all of eternity in the Godhead has been loving community and fellowship and us being made in His image, are not whole without loving relationships also. I pray you have a loving family to enjoy this Christmas with.

But what about the incarnation? Is love evident in the incarnation?

II. **THE LOVE EVIDENT IN THE INCARNATION.**

I would say that the incarnation is one giant act of love. The incarnation as a whole, from conception by the Holy Spirit to ascension after the resurrection, is one giant act of His giving of Himself for us. Mild He laid His glories by out of love, being born that men no more may die, the song says.

It's right there in the Christian anthem of John 3:16 – “For **God so loved the world that He gave** His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.” He SO LOVED that He GAVE. Why? Because we're sinners and we needed a Savior. 2 Corinthians 5:19 says, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself.” **Reconciling** meaning, making a way for us to go from war with God because of our sins, to peace. He was making a way to forever bring us back to Him, restoring the fellowship, bridging the chasm... and the only way to do that was for Him to die for man's sin. **God is love but He is also just** which means someone had to pay the penalty for man's sins and only God could do that and do it sufficiently and forever.

* **God is love but He is also just. Attributes are understood in light of other attributes.** Many people today have been influence by the **relativistic idea that God is love and because of this, everyone will end up in heaven. He just overlooks sin and loves all.** Or no one is really lost and that everyone is right. And that everyone should love and live by their own “truth”, or their own “light”. The incarnation flies in the face of such ideas, saying this is the truth and if you don't believe it or ignore it, you perish. If the incarnation is true, nothing else is right. As one man said, the “‘all accepting god of love’ would have found it unnecessary to be incarnated to die for sins.”^{iv}

You know, every time I think of the name of this coffee and waffle joint downtown called **Just Love Café**, I wonder if they know how theological their name really is. To the person who came up with it, the name probably means something along the lines of ‘*I just love their coffee*’ but to me it is a reminder of how **God's love is just. Our sin which deserved God's wrath was paid by His giving of Himself in love.** He took the wrath we deserve. And there's no greater love than that. John 15:13 says, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”

* **There is no greater love than the sacrificial giving of self. (John 15:13)** The cross then, becomes the greatest demonstration of His love. Because of it no one has to wonder if God is love and has loved towards them because He died for the whole world. Romans 5:8, “But God demonstrates His own love for us in this, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” But the death for us would not have been possible without the incarnation. **The cradle and the cross go together. All of it a free, loving choice of God. A gift from Him. But it is a gift that must be received and opened by faith** – by trusting in His love to you in Christ.

When you understand this measureless love of God in Christ – it casts out fear, the Bible says (1 John 4:18). Fear like the fish or the sparrows in the storm. “For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.” He took our punishment, and therefore we know we can approach Him and come to Him because He loves us. For God so loved you that He gave His only Son.

I find the prayer of Paul for the Ephesians in Ephesians 3:16-18 just incredible. He prayed that they would grasp the infinite greatness of God’s love in Christ. “For this reason I bend my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner self, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being **rooted and grounded in love**, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and height and depth, and **to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge**, that you may be filled to all the fullness of God.”

✦ **Be rooted and grounded in the love that surpasses understanding this Christmas. (Eph. 3:16-18)**

So often we think of the Philippians verse about the peace of God surpasses all understanding but there is also a love that surpasses understanding and it’s only found in Jesus Christ. Trust in His love this Christmas.

Before we celebrate by lighting candles and ringing bells and singing, **beloved, can I challenge you this Christmas to love someone with the same self-giving love of Christ? To make His gift the gift that keeps on giving?** Because this is **communicable attribute** (shared with us), which means He shares His love with us so that we should share it with others. Let’s give of ourselves sacrificially this Christmas like Christ did for us and make His gift, the gift that keeps on giving.

✦ **Love is a communicable (shareable) attribute of God.**

1 John 3:16 says, “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.”

Who can you love this Christmas who needs it? Need some ideas? These are word and deed ideas:

- ✦ Hug someone tightly and tell them “I love you.”
- ✦ Mend a quarrel.
- ✦ Seek out a forgotten friend.
- ✦ Forgive an enemy.
- ✦ Be gentle and patient with an angry person.
- ✦ Express appreciation.
- ✦ Gladden the heart of a child.
- ✦ Speak kindly to a stranger.

- ✦ Enter another's sorrow.
- ✦ Smile. Laugh a little. Laugh a little more.
- ✦ Lessen your demands on others.
- ✦ Apologize if you were wrong.
- ✦ Do the dishes for the family.
- ✦ Talk together with the television off.
- ✦ Encourage an older person.
- ✦ Offer to babysit for a weary mother.
- ✦ Make or bake something for someone else.
- ✦ Listen.^v

Let's give of ourselves sacrificially this Christmas like Christ did for us and make His gift, the gift that keeps on giving.

ⁱ Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 38.

ⁱⁱ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1948, 1976), 205.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Tim Keller, *Hidden Christmas*, article from December 5, 2016.

^v Charles Swindoll, *The Gift That Keeps on Giving*, Daily Devotional 2020.