

## KEEP YOURSELVES IN THE LOVE OF GOD

### INTRODUCTION:

Please take your Bibles and turn to Romans 15. In SS, we've been looking at the reasons we should study the Word of God. One reason is because God commands it. Joshua 1:8 reminds us "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest **observe to do** according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success." Simply put, we are to meditate on God's Word so we know what it says so we can **obey** it!

A second reason we are to study God's Word is because it is **God's** Word—it is God's revelation of Himself to mankind. From it we learn of

- the character of God—what He is like
- the conversion of men—how we can be forgiven of their sins and become children of God
- and the conduct of men—how it is that we are supposed to live in this world.

Yet another reason we should read and study and memorize God's Word is found here in Romans 15. Notice verse 4: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."

- The things written aforetime—a reference to the OT—were written for our learning; our instruction
- What is the result of that instruction? Three things:
  - We will have patience—meaning perseverance; a keep-going/never-give-up kind of attitude
  - We will have comfort—encouragement—from the Scriptures.
  - We will have hope—confidence—that everything will be fine in the end

The point I want us to see here is this—the Bible doesn't **just** tell us what God is like and what He wants us to do—He also tells us things that will **comfort and encourage** us.

With that as a backdrop, this morning I'm going to start a series entitled "The Comfort of the Scriptures." What are things God has said in His Word to **us**—to you and me—that are designed to comfort us; to console us; to cheer us? There are obviously a number of them—but there is not a **list** of them, per se. There is not a passage of Scripture—or book in the Bible—where God says 'Here is a list of all the things I've written to comfort you.' Instead, these truths are like threads that start in Genesis and wind their way throughout the entire Bible all the way to Revelation. Here are a few examples:

--We are thought about by God. **Psalms 139:17** "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!"

--We are protected by God. **Psalms 4:8** "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety."

--We are provided for by God. **Matthew 6:26** "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?"

One I didn't mention yet—but one you've probably already thought about—is what we might call the "grand-daddy" of them all: we are **loved** by God. Question: Is it **self-centered** to meditate on God's love for us? I don't believe it is and here's why.

1) First is the reason I just gave—God gives us His Word to **comfort** us and one way to be comforted is to think on God's love to us.

2) Understanding God's love for us **motivates us** to love Him. I John 4:19 says that very thing—"We love Him because He first loved us."

3) Third—and this one may surprise you—is that God **commands** us to "Keep ourselves in the love of God..." We have that very phrase in the book of Jude, verse 21. There is obviously a gold-mine of wonderful, comforting truths in Jude 21-25, but we are going to focus on just one: "Keep yourselves in the love of God..."

## 1. What does it mean to “keep yourselves in the love of God?”

Commentators suggest four possible meanings. I don’t want to take up a lot of time dissecting all 4 of them, but I do want to at least give you them to you. The “labels” I have here are not what the commentators called their view; it is just a name I came up with to hopefully help you see the difference better.

### A. “Obedience” view (MacArthur)

I don’t disagree with MacArthur often, but I certainly do here. He suggests that the meaning is to “keep yourself in the place where you experience the blessing that God’s love brings.” He then adds “Don’t get on the bad side of God.” In other words, MacArthur is suggesting that we keep ourselves in a “lovable state” by being obedient to Him. John 15:9-10 conveys a similar thought.

### B. “Our love to God” view

Others suggest that it is referring to our love to God—not His love to us. In other words, we are to not get cold in our love to God and are to do what we can to increase the intensity and warmth of our love to God. I don’t think this one captures the meaning either.

Before I discuss the other two suggestions, I do want to mention that the challenge in understanding the verse comes from determining the meaning of the word “keep.” It comes from the Greek word “tay-reh-o” which is used between 70 and 80 times in the Greek NT. It is interesting to note that a form of “tay-reh-o” is used 4 times in this chapter besides in verse 21. It is translated “preserved” in v 1; “kept” and “reserved” in v 6; “reserved” in v 13, and “keep” in verse 21. With those possible definitions comes two other views.

C. “Preserve” view. The idea here is that we “preserve ourselves” from Satan’s temptations...and the tug of the world...and the lusts of our own sinful nature...by running to the protection of God’s love. In other words, we look to God for protection because He loves us. Although that is close, I think it is a little too narrow in its scope.

### D. “Stand firm in God’s love to you”

John Gill describes what I’m calling the “Stand firm in God’s love to you” view. In this view, God’s people are exhorted to set His love “always before them, to keep it constantly in view, to exercise faith on it, firmly believing their interest in it; as also to meditate on it, give themselves up wholly to the contemplation of it....”

In other words, “bask” in, believe, and enjoy the love that God has to you! Why do I believe this is the best way to explain the meaning of this verse?

--I don’t believe it is the “obedience” view because of the rest of the verse 21. Often times in Scripture when faithful obedience to God is tied in with the return of Christ, rewards are mentioned. That is obviously not the case here.

--I don’t believe it is “our love to God view” because it is tied in with the “mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ”—which is obviously **from** Jesus to **us**. If one part of the verse is referring to something that God gives to us—like mercy—it is good to view the rest of the verse in the same “direction.”

--Lastly, the concept of God wanting us to **enjoy** the love that He has for us is given to us in other places in the Bible. Here are a few.

**II Corinthians 13:14** “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and **the love of God**, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, **be with you all**. Amen.”

**Ephesians 3:19** “And to know **the love of Christ**, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the **fulness of God**.” Part of experiencing God’s fullness—all that He has given us and wants to give us—requires us to experience the love Christ has for us.

**I John 4:16** “And we have **known and believed the love that God hath to us**. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.” We are to know—to **experience—and believe** God’s love to us.

## 2. How do we keep ourselves in the love of God?

How do we practically do what Gill suggests; how do we keep God's love constantly in view...exercise faith on it...and meditate on it? Here are a couple of suggestions.

### A. Familiarize yourself with the many facets of God's love

Although I'm sure it would be helpful to dwell on the simple thought "God loves me;" I think it would be even **more** beneficial to become familiar with the different aspects of God's love. Think of God's love being like a diamond. Diamonds are beautiful—but are they not even more beautiful when you move them in such a way that the sunlight sparkles off their many sides? The same can be said of God's love. God's love in general is wonderful, but to know the many sides of it—to see God's love from different angles—is even more wonderful. We obviously don't have time to "do justice" to the many facets of God's love, but here are a few:

#### i. The permanence of God's love

When did God **start** loving you? When will He **stop** loving you? God's Word answers those questions for us. **Jeremiah 31:3** "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, **I have loved thee with an everlasting love**: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." We know in our **heads** that He loved us before He created us—and will love us for all eternity—but do we ponder that truth enough to let it sink into our hearts?

Do we mull it over in our minds—or do we forget sometimes? God **loved** you yesterday...He **loves** you today...and He **will love** you tomorrow. Why do I say that? Because that is what everlasting means! The permanence of God's love is not dependent on **us** and what we **do**—it is dependent on God and who He is!

God is love...and does not change...and is eternal—so His love to us will not change. It is everlasting! Let that sink in! Believe it and embrace it and enjoy it. You are loved with an everlasting love!

#### ii. The power of God's love

How strong is God's love? What can stop Him from loving us? God's Word not only gives us the answer—it actually **asks that very question!** Let's **turn to** Romans 8:35 "Who [or what] shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"

--Shall tribulation and trials—bad things that happen in your life—separate you from the love of Christ?

--What about persecution...or not having enough food or clothes? Will that separate you from the love of Christ? --What about danger—peril or sword? Will that separate you from the love of Christ?

--Verse 36 says those things can come upon us—we are not exempt from them. "For thy sake we are killed all the day long" is a reality to God's people in certain parts of the world. Does that mean we are not loved by God?

--Not according to verse 37: "Nay, in all these things we are **more than conquerors** through Him that loved us."

--And now verses 38-39 "For I am **persuaded**,".... Paul believed in...and was convinced of the fact that **NOTHING** would separate Him from the love of God! We can't go into depth on all Paul lists here, but I do want to highlight a few.

--Death, of course, does not separate us from the love of God because it brings us into the very presence of the God who loves us! But what about the death of a **loved one**? Does the death of someone you love mean God doesn't love you? No; God still loves you even when someone you love dies.

--"Things present" don't separate you from the love of God. Don't think for a moment that just because bad things are happening in your life that God has all of a sudden stopped loving you. I don't want to get too detailed, but think of all the things presently going on in our congregation and in people we know.

--We have a myriad of aches and pains and medical problems.

--We have problems with people **in our** home—and we have problems **with** our home. One of our member's mother had tornado damage in TN; my wife's sister and brother-in-law had a tree fall on their cabin courtesy of a logging company.

--We have family problems...and money problems...and vehicle problems...and work problems None of these things—and the hundreds of others I'm sure we could list—separate us from the love of God. There are several more aspects of God's love we could look at, but we only have time for one more.

### iii. The proof of God's love

Verse 32: "He that **spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up** for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" When you are tempted to doubt God's love, come to this verse and let this thought take hold of your heart and mind—God already gave you the **greatest gift** He could give—His own Son!

Anything else you need pales in comparison to the need He has already provided. You have sinned—and do sin—**daily** against a holy God that is absolutely perfect and just and must punish sin. He provided a way for you to be free from that punishment by sending His Son to take the punishment that you and I deserve. **John 3:16** "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

**Romans 5:8** "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, **while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.**"

How do we bask in and enjoy God's love to us? We need to familiarize ourselves with the facets—the aspects/details—of God's love to us. Second, we need to...

#### B. Focus on the fact of God's love—not your feelings

Our feelings are so fickle, aren't they? They constantly change and often have us on an emotional roll-coaster. Sometimes they go down gradually—and other times with "break-neck" speed. We can have slow, steady climb to an awe-inspiring view—but only have that view for a second before we come speeding down from it.

Having raised three daughters, on more than one occasion I would say "Focus on the facts—not feelings. Facts need to drive the train and the feelings will follow." But sometimes we get it backwards, don't we, and focus too much on feelings. We let the caboose lead instead of the engine.

Knowing about these truths—and maybe being reminded of them from time to time—is not enough. We need to meditate on God's love and muse on it and roll it around in our minds until it thaws our hard hearts. We need to be captivated by God's love and be so familiar with it that when feelings of doubt creep in, we can push them away with facts.

Maybe an illustration will help: The story goes of an evangelist who was visiting a good friend whose wife had been ill for quite some time with rheumatic fever. Her illness was long and difficult and although she was recovered from it, she was struggling with bouts of depression and doubts of being accepted by God. The evangelist tried to encourage her on multiple occasions to "Keep herself in the love of God" but it didn't seem to get through to her. While staying at their home, he noticed that her morning routine was to sit in a parlor that had a bay window. Instead of sitting where she could look out, she sat where the sun beat down on her shoulders. The evangelist asked, "Why do you come so often and sit so long in this window?" She explained how that when most of her pain was gone, her one shoulder still bothered her. Her doctor said he couldn't do much more for her, but suggested she sit in the window and allow the sun's rays to warm her shoulder to see if that would help. "So did it help?" the evangelist asked. "Oh, yes!" She went on to explain that pain was gone after about ten days, but she still comes to the window to feel and enjoy the warmth of the sun.

"Ah, my friend," the evangelist replied, "now you have been preaching my sermon. That is exactly what the apostle is exhorting you to do when he says, 'Keep yourselves in the love of God.' Your poor soul has grown cold, and is full of the rheumatism of doubt and distress. In vain **you have tried to expel** your doubts and fears. **There is but one remedy.** Go and sit in the south window of God's love, and let the warm, life-giving rays of His glad sunshine pour themselves into your heart, and you may be sure His love will chase out every doubt and fear, thaw away all coldness, and fill you with a joy and peace that will be more delicious to your soul than this material sunshine is to your poor body. And, moreover, after your doubts and fears have been dissipated, you will be glad of an hour every day. Yea, you will be glad of the privilege of sitting, or standing, or walking, or working all the day long in the 'love of God.'"

What a wonderful picture of "basking" in the love of God—and what a wonder it will do for our hearts! One last question—and I will try to be brief—is this:

### **3. Who is supposed to keep themselves in the love of God?**

Let's go back to Jude and see that the context is very specific—it let's us know **who** is to keep themselves in the love of God. Notice verse 20 "But ye, **beloved**, building up yourselves on **your most holy faith**, praying in the Holy Ghost,"

This instruction—this command—is for **believers**—God's children—to keep themselves in the love of God. How do we know that?

--In v 20, they are called **beloved**--and the holy faith is something they possess—"your most holy faith." In other words, it is for those who have trusted Christ as their Savior from the penalty of their sin.

--Also in v 20, they are to "pray in the Holy Ghost." Only God's children have the HS living w/i them

--In v 21, it is for those who are looking to Jesus for mercy and eternal life

--And in verses 22-23, we see there are those who are **not** saved that need to be saved (read).

Everyone of us is here somewhere in these verses. We are either **the beloved**—God's children that are looking for salvation only in Jesus—or we are those that still need to be "pulled out of the fire." Where are **you** in these verses? Are you a child of God—or are you facing the wrath of God and need to be pulled from the fire?

#### **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS/QUESTIONS:**

1. First and foremost, are you saved...have you been pulled from the fire of God's future judgement? If not—if you have rejected God's way to be saved or think you don't need to be saved—then God's love for **you is not everlasting**; it will end when you die. If you reject the love of God in this life, it is not available to you in the next. Don't stay in the fire—get out before it is too late!

2. Child of God, are you bothered by feelings of disappointment...and despair...and doubts? Do fears and failures haunt you; do the trials of life tempt you to doubt God's love? Meditate on the permanence and power and proof of God's love. Believe it, enjoy it, and "bask" in it as you would the sun coming upon you and warming your body. "Keep yourselves in the love of God"