

God's Love Contrasted to Ours

By Ginny Larsen

*"For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in your faithfulness."
(Psalm 26:3)*

God's love is always steadfast, and I can always count on it. Because of that, I can walk in His faithfulness and pray, "Lord, keep my eyes on that steadfast love and faithfulness of Yours today through everything."

In a world full of self-absorption, where love means little more than desire, lust, and self-gratification, how do we as Christians walk in true "agape" love? How do we understand the love that is God's alone, which only we, His children, have access to? How do we learn to know it? How do we see it in contrast to the self-love of our sinful nature? How do we realize our death to it is life in His love? Knowing God's love is so much more than head knowledge. It is so much more than our attempt to have the right "feelings" for someone. It is so much more than our efforts to do the right thing toward a brother or sister while at the same time our hearts are really focused on our own interests. God's love comes from faith in the new creation of love that God Himself has made us. He Himself must be living His life in us if we are to understand His love. It comes from faith in Him and the outpouring of that love through His Spirit in our hearts (Romans 5:5).

The very nature of the new creation is the nature of God Himself, and that is love. We see in our old nature an evident lack of love. This reality is brought out again and again when we are faced with a need for obedience to His law of love, and we find ourselves unable to perform it. We see our self-love more and more as we try to love in our own way. We try to overcome it, squelch it, excuse it, and turn it around. We try every which way to make it into a Godly love, yet it remains what it always was: self-love.

When we see it, we should be very thankful that God has enabled us finally to see ourselves as we are. We should be so very thankful He has given us the grace to see our flesh for what it is in all its ugliness, in light of His perfect, selfless love that never fails under any circumstance. The more we see that perfect love, the more we also see the contrast to our own self-love. We should be so thankful when the Lord shows us the disgusting reality of our self-love. The more disgusted with that fleshly carnal self-love we become, the more thankful we should be, because it's only then that God can truly deliver us from it and teach us more of the power of His cross to deliver and raise us up to His love for others.

Friendships, family relationships, and relationships in the Body of Christ are God's way of teaching us how to love rather than as a means of getting love. Sometimes we get that priority backwards and try to get what we can out of each one. When that happens, there is carnal strife, hurts, divisions, and all sorts of footholds for the enemy. Every human encounter in our lives gives us opportunity in some way to learn of His love and to walk in it. Too often, we fail to see this. We judge relationships by how they benefit us, not by how we can learn to walk in God's love through them and demonstrate His love to those around us. We must see our relationships and every human encounter from God's perspective. We must see His purposes in us, not our own, and not how we can or cannot benefit from them.

Some people become a sort of "thorn in our flesh" in our lives, but even these people are in our lives for His purpose, so that we will learn more of His great love and how He practiced and demonstrated it to us when we were very unlovely. It is by God's loving us while we were very

unlovable (even repulsive to Him) in sin that we saw a love that was so radically outside of our concept of love that we were changed and overcome by it.

God is calling us to His kind of love. He is calling us for friendship that goes beyond our own interests. He's calling us to a love that looks beyond our offenses to His purposes. *"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity"* (Pr. 17:17). *"A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother"* (Pr. 18:24). He's calling us to a love that lets go when need be, so that He can do His work.

He's calling us to a love that won't let us climb a pedestal or usurp the place of His Spirit in another person's life. He's calling us to His Love that won't place another person on that pedestal in our lives. Our Calling is to love God with all our heart, soul, and strength, and then, and only then, love our neighbor, friend, brother, sister, enemy, as He Himself loves them and according to His desires for them. He's calling us to become vessels of His love. *"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends"* (John 15:13).

These are the lessons I've been learning in mother, wife, friend, co-worker, and in every relationship God has brought my way. God has taught me in my own yearning for love, in my own great need for friendship, in my times of loneliness, in my coming to the end of my own ability to love, and even in my times of greatest hurt.

I've learned to be so thankful every time I see my own jealousy, hurt, quickness to be defensive, and quickness to paint myself better than another in others' eyes. I've learned to recognize and despise my flesh and cling to His cross. I've learned to turn to His love to overcome and subdue any carnality and let Him fill me with His love. I've learned He is faithful and all-powerful to help me when I trust Him to! Oh what a great thing! What a joy to see His power to work in me and to know that in all my inability, He is able! He supplies what is needed to fulfill what He commands us to do if we simply acknowledge our inability and trust Him for it!

Thank You, Jesus, for Your great and perfect love and for showing us that You never called us to better our own or to try to turn our own lack of Godly love into something other than it is. You called us to see our self-love for what it is, bring it as a sacrifice to Your cross, and there, in our emptiness, be filled with Your infinite, healing love. Thank You that Your *"love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things"* (1 Co 13:7). Amen.