

# **THE LOVE OF GOD IN THE QUR'AN AND THE BIBLE**

**By  
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NOTE: All Qur'an quotations from Abdullah Yussuf Ali,  
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**F**alling in love with someone is a fantastic feeling. But when that love is rejected it is also one of the most humiliating and devastating experiences.

Among all the religions in the world the Sufis were perhaps some of the most intense "lovers of God". Rabi'a, the well-known slave-girl from Basra (today's Iraq) has won a place in the hearts of many for her repeated expressions of love for God. She used to pray: "O my Lord, if I worship you from fear of hell, burn me in hell. And if I worship you from hope of paradise, exclude me from it. But if I worship you for your own sake, then withhold not from me your eternal beauty."

What an admirable prayer! But even so one asks: did she have any assurance that the one she approached with such intense feelings was willing to receive and return such love? How sure can we be about the love of God for us? And what conditions do we need to fulfill in order to attract and deserve His love?

## THE LOVE OF GOD IN THE QUR'AN AND THE BIBLE

*"Observe the commands of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and revering him."  
Deuteronomy 8:6*

Moses spoke these words to the Children of Israel shortly before he died. No one need marvel at them for our Creator naturally has the right to demand that his creatures obey his laws and commandments. It is our natural duty to keep God's laws, and we deservedly incur his wrath if we do not do so. Just as a servant is obliged to render loyal service to his master, so it is the duty of all men to fear God and keep his commandments (Ecclesiastes 12:13). If we were to ask, however, which is the greatest of all God's commandments, what would the answer be? *Would it be simply that we must believe in the oneness of God and perform the duties he lays upon us? Or is some higher obligation expected of us?* Let us hear Moses again to discover whether indeed there is a greater duty upon us towards God other than that of simply keeping his laws.

*"What does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the*

*Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul."  
Deuteronomy 10:12*

Once again the command to serve God is given to us but now a new dimension has come into the command. It is found in these three words: "to love him". Principally the difference made by these three words is that our service to God is not to be merely the slave-like exercise of the duties he lays upon us but clearly must be the expression of the affections of our own hearts toward him. Moses very carefully made his people know that such is the service God expects from men. The mere discharge of a duty is not what he requires. The only service he will accept from men is that which flows from love that proceeds from the heart. Moses emphasises this fact again and again during his last words to the Children of Israel:

**The only service  
he will accept  
from men is that  
which flows from  
love that proceeds  
from the heart**



*LOVE the Lord your God and keep his requirements.*

*Deuteronomy 11:1*

*I command you this day, to love the Lord your God.*

*Deuteronomy 11:13 (KJV)*

In his eyes, therefore, it is of supreme importance that we serve God out of love and that all that we do should be done in love towards him.

## **1. THE FIRST AND GREATEST COMMANDMENT**

Centuries later a Jewish scribe came up to Jesus and put a question to him to test his interpretation of the law to see whether he agreed with the opinions of the Jewish elders:

*"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"*

*Matthew 22:36*

The Jews had studied God's laws exhaustively and this one wished to test Jesus to see what answer he would give him to this question. At once Jesus said:

*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.*

*This is the first and greatest commandment."*

*Matthew 22:37-38*

The command to love God is therefore the greatest and foremost of all his commands. All other laws and all the teachings of the prophets are summed up in this one law to love the Lord with

all our hearts, souls and minds. No other law can faithfully be kept unless it is kept in a spirit of love.

What, however, is love? Can we say that by our efforts to obey God's laws we automatically show that we love him? That obedience to his commands is an essential aspect of love towards him is not to be disputed. No one who disobeys his commands loves him. Nevertheless the mere performance of religious duties is not proof of the presence of love. Men who endeavour to serve God may do so through fear, pride or prospect of reward. Love, therefore, is not necessarily the motivation behind such service. We must serve and obey God if we love him but this service must be done out of love, and must be motivated by love. One of the closest disciples of Jesus, the Apostle John, put it as follows:

*And this is love that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the*

*beginning his command is that you walk in love. 2 John 6*

There is clearly something intensely deep about obedience that grows out of love. When we analyse the basic principles of love, we find certain essential features which must be present for this love to be truly exercised.

Firstly, love must be *genuine* (Romans 12:9). It must be an uninhibited expression of the affections of the heart. There must be complete freedom for such love to be genuinely exercised. If there is any presence of fear in the heart, love cannot be openly displayed. The fear of punishment will automatically disqualify the one who has it from genuinely loving the one he fears. All his service towards that person will be done with the purpose of alleviating the wrath of that person towards him. Such service, therefore, springs not from love but from self-motivation. The man who serves God because he has no assurance of forgiveness from God, and seeks by this service to obtain that forgiveness, has his own welfare at heart. He most certainly does not truly love God for love is selfless. Love, as a motivation of the heart, knows no partners. For love to be genuine there cannot be any other factor affecting the service of the one who seeks to express that love.

*There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. 1John 4:18*

Accordingly, if a man would serve God and keep his commandments through genuine love, there may not be any fear of God's wrath in his heart. This makes it essential, from the outset, for there to be complete knowledge of forgiveness in the heart of the man who would serve God out of love. That forgiveness must be experienced now, and may not be an uncertain prospect at a time to come in the future.

If a man is unsure whether God has completely forgiven all his sins, and if he does not enjoy a state of permanent forgiveness for all that he may think or do, he cannot possibly serve God out of genuine love. Though he professes love towards God, he must really serve him with the primary objective of obtaining his forgiveness and alleviating his wrath. Such service is, as we have seen, principally self-motivated for it seeks approval for itself rather than the glory of God. Therefore, if we are to truly love God, we must first experience the perfect knowledge of his forgiveness in our hearts. For our love to be genuine, a condition of

complete peace with God must reign within us.

Secondly, love must be *expressive*. Unless deeds of love flow from the heart, there is no love in the heart of the worshipper. Love is an empty vacuum unless it manifests itself in appropriate ways.

*Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. 1John 3:18*

From the side of man the obvious form of this expression is through heartfelt obedience to God's commands. As Jesus himself put it on the last night he was with his disciples:

*"Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me." John 14:21*

God will discover no love in us towards him if we do not obey his commands. Nevertheless, if it is God's desire not only that we should obey his laws but that we should do so completely out of love, then it is essential that there be in the nature of God that which merits this love. The expression of man's love towards God must be in response to, and in gratitude for, the manifestation of God's love towards man. If men have knowledge of the love of God through some definite revelation of it in the history of God's dealings with them, then it is not only possible but essential that

men express their appreciation of this fact through love towards God.

In one of the most beautiful books in the Bible, the Song of Solomon, we have a splendid example of this principle. The book concerns the deepest affections of a man and his bride for one another. On one occasion when he was apart from her, she sought him desperately, saying to her companions:

*"I adjure (charge) you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I am sick with love."  
Song of Solomon 5:8 (KJV)*

Mildly surprised by this determined quest for the presence of the one she loved (which they apparently did not share for their own partners), her companions said to her in reply:

*"What is your beloved more than another beloved?"  
Song of Solomon 5:9 (KJV)*

In a lengthy reply she detailed the worth of her loved one and showed that she considered him to excel in every respect, from his head to his feet. He was, in her view, distinguished among ten thousand. It was little wonder that a deeper expression of love for her beloved sprang from her heart than from those of her companions for their spouses. She

summed up his worth in these words:

*"His speech is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem."*

*Song of Solomon 5:16 (KJV)*

Because he excelled in honour all the other men of her nation she naturally expressed a deeper affection for him than her companions did for their husbands. With these principles in mind it must surely be true that those who see the very best of God's love towards men will respond in the most fervent way in love towards him. Those who see God's love in the works of nature and the many providential graces he extends towards us will find it possible to express love to him in return. But if God should choose to demonstrate his love for mankind by giving of his very own self to redeem them from sin, no men on earth will know the capacity of love towards God except those who personally have experienced this redemption.

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The deeper the revelation of God's love towards mankind, the deeper will be the response of love towards him in those who believe in and appropriate the effects of this love.

Thirdly, love must be *mutual*. No man will be able to sustain love in his heart towards a woman who scorns that love. Within a marriage love can only really develop where the spouses reciprocate their love for each other. If we are to be rooted and grounded in love for one another, it is necessary that such love be mutual for a perfect balance to take effect. An achievement of such mutual love will result in such an expression as this from the one who shares in that love:

*"I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine."*

*Song of Solomon 6:3 (KJV)*

Love is the greatest of all gifts freely provided by God (1Corinthians 13:13). When God commands men to love him with all their hearts, he is drawing on the greatest of all virtues in doing so. He seeks the best form of worship he could possibly obtain from them. But for such worship to develop to its highest possible potential in men, the expression of love between men and God must be mutual. Not only is it necessary for God to manifest his love towards men but he must also

allow men the fullest possible experience of that love in their own hearts for such mutual love to truly be present.

Therefore let us at this stage formulate our conclusions about the "greatest command" that each of us should love God with all his heart, soul and mind. This command demonstrates the will of God that men should give of their very best for him. Nothing less than genuine love, expressed in positive ways, is acceptable to God. But for this to be possible on the part of men, three initiatives are needed on the part of God. They are these:

He must offer forgiveness of sins to all from whom he expects this love so that it may be real and undisturbed by fear.

He must manifest and reveal his love for men in such a way that they can respond to him in love.

He must allow men the personal knowledge of his love and a living experience of it in their hearts if a mutual, lasting fellowship based on love is to develop between him and them.

It may seem strange, even presumptuous, to some men to say that God "must" do these things, but when all the implications are considered it is surely obvious that for creatures to obey the command to love God, these factors must of necessity be present. Otherwise men cannot possibly exert such genuine love towards God as he expects of them.

## 2. THE LOVE OF GOD IN THE QUR'AN

Both the Bible and the Qur'an claim to be the Word of God but any serious reader will soon notice that God is presented strikingly different in these two books. What we are particularly concerned about here, however, is to discover in which book we find the best revelation of God's love towards men. Let us begin by studying briefly the teaching of the Qur'an about the love of God.

*Firstly*, the Qur'an exhorts men to love God. Perhaps the clearest

verse in the Qur'an which demonstrates this is:

*Say, if ye love God, follow me;  
God will love you and forgive  
you your sins.*

*Surah 3:31 (A. Yusuf Ali)*

Significantly, however, one does not find in this verse (nor in any other in the Qur'an) the command to love God with "all your heart, soul and mind". The reason is fairly clear from the verse itself. The hearer is exhorted to love God so that he may thereby obtain God's

love and forgiveness. The basic object, therefore, of this love is the acquittal<sup>1</sup> and approval of God for the believer. Accordingly the motivation for such love must be the welfare and comfort of the believer. It is not suggested in the Qur'an that such love must be exercised in a disinterested and selfless manner with the glory of God foremost in the believer's mind. On the contrary the object of such love is really the believer himself. He seeks by this love fundamentally to turn aside God's wrath and to gain his approval in its place. Now this is not the fruit of genuine love. Such love, as we have seen, must be the exercise of the purest affections of the heart towards God - it cannot be accompanied by an alternative motive such as the principal objective of obtaining God's forgiveness.

For this reason it is therefore quite significant that the Qur'an does not exhort the believer to love God with all his heart. Such love from the heart is essentially selfless in nature. That which seeks its own security does not proceed from the heart. It is not the expression of the deepest affections of the very kernel of a man's being. Love in the latter sense seeks principally the glory of its object - but that which strives for the approval of God and considers primarily its own

prospects of forgiveness is fundamentally self-motivated. It cannot be described as genuine love and certainly he who loves God chiefly to obtain his forgiveness is not fulfilling the royal commandment - indeed what Jesus called the "first and greatest commandment" to love God with all his heart, soul and mind. As we saw earlier, the fear of God's wrath disqualifies the potential for genuine love in the heart.

The Qur'an does not give the believer any total assurance of the forgiveness of all his sins this side of the grave. Accordingly it is hardly surprising that it sets the prospect of forgiveness at the end of life as the reward of service to God. Even then there is no complete assurance that the believer will be forgiven and the believer can only die in the hope of God's mercy (Surah 17:57). It must again be stressed, however, that such service is done purely out of love towards oneself with the welfare of the self at heart. Only when the believer begins with the total knowledge of God's forgiveness can he serve God freely out of genuine love. As long as he fears God's wrath he cannot possibly exercise real love towards God with the glory of God as the principal concern of his heart.

Accordingly it must be concluded that the teaching of the Qur'an

does not meet the needs of genuine love. It leaves presently undecided the fact of forgiveness and its exhortations to men to love God are given with one chief objective - the realisation of his acquittal and approval. In such circumstances a man cannot honestly love God with all his heart. He cannot express such love without some prospect of acquittal and acceptance with God foremost in his soul and mind.

Secondly, we find that the Qur'an says very little about the expression of God's love for mankind. Almost invariably the Qur'an speaks of this love as an expression of approval of those who do good. This verse gives a typical example of this fact (and has the same theme as the others on this subject):

*Spend your wealth for the cause of Allah, and be not cast by your own hands to ruin; and do good. Lo! Allah loveth the beneficent. Surah 2:195*

**As long as he fears God's wrath he cannot possibly exercise real love towards God with the glory of God as the principal concern of his heart**



Throughout the Qur'an we read that Allah loves those who do good and does not love those who do evil. This means principally that he *approves* of those who do good and accordingly disapproves of those who do evil. In every case where the expression occurs in the Qur'an it can easily be translated "approves of" instead of "loves" without any change in the meaning of the expression at all. The knowledge and realisation of this approval will also only be known at the Last Day. This is virtually all that the Qur'an says about the love of God towards mankind.

In our view this is insufficient to awaken in men heartfelt love towards God. There is no present expression of that love from God which can evoke the response of love in men towards him. Indeed the Qur'an often appeals to that which is visible in nature as a proof of God's existence and character. But it is the order in nature itself which reveals the existence and sovereignty of the one true God (Romans 1.20). The Qur'an does not reveal this fact - it is merely appealing to the revelation of it in nature. But apart from this the Qur'an tells us really nothing about the depth of the love of God towards men outside of that which can be discovered in nature. It does not disclose any great act of love in the history of God's

dealings with men which should cause the response of heartfelt love towards him in return. To put it in a nutshell, there is no definite expression of love in the heart of God towards men in the Qur'an. No proof of deep affection towards mankind is given at all.

The filial love that a father has for his own children and the revelation of that love is not found in the relationship between God and men in the Qur'an. It has no concept of the Fatherhood of God and *whereas God is most commonly called "the Father" in the Bible no such exalted title is found in the Qur'an.* Furthermore there is no manifestation of God's love towards mankind which is of the greatest form of love - that of self-denial and self-sacrifice. One does not find in the Qur'an a unilateral<sup>2</sup> display of love in God which expresses itself on behalf of mankind in such a way that God is willing to give of *himself* to prove and manifest that love. Indeed, even in respect of the teaching that he "loves" those who do good we do not find that this love is an expression of sentiment in the heart of God towards the faithful.

**Throughout the  
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In the context of this hadith - which is very consistent with the teaching of the Qur'an about the attitude of Allah towards mankind (Surah 5:18) - we see very clearly the total lack of sentiment in this love:

*Verily Allah created Adam and then rubbed his back with His right hand and took out a progeny from him and said: I created these for Paradise and with the actions of the inmates of Paradise which they will do. Afterwards he rubbed his back with His hand and took out a progeny from him and said: I created these for Hell and with the actions of the inmates of Hell which they will do.*

*Mishkat al-Masabih, Vol.3, p.107*

We must conclude that there is no expression of glorious, heartfelt love of God in the Qur'an which would enable men in return to honour his desire and command that we should love him with all our 'hearts, souls and minds. If God in his very own nature does not have heartfelt love towards men, they cannot possibly be expected to express such love towards him in return.

Lastly we find, as a matter of course after what has already been said, that there is, in the teaching of the Qur'an, no capacity for mutual love between God and

men such as that between a man and his wife which we discover in the Song of Solomon. It is not possible, according to the Qur'an, for men to actually experience God's love in their very own hearts such as a son's experience of his father's love and a wife of her husband's love. God is indeed called the "Loving One" (*al-Wadud*) in the Qur'an but only on two occasions (Surahs 11:90, 85:14). This statement, however, does not imply the depth of love in the nature of God such as is found in the Biblical declaration "God is love" (1 John 4:8). Instead one of the great theologians in Islamic history, al-Ghazzali, is at pains to inform us that the expression "the Loving One" means far less than the title would seem to indicate. In his work on the names of God in the Qur'an entitled *Al-Maqsad al-Asna* he states that this title in the Qur'an is a lesser one, for example, than "the Merciful" (*ar-Rahim*) - an opinion with which we find ourselves compelled to agree, for *God is called "the Merciful" over two hundred times in the Qur'an but "the Loving One" only twice*. Al-Ghazzali explains this love as consisting solely of *objective* acts of kindness and expressions of approval. He denies that there is any subjectivity in the love of God, that is, that God feels any love in his own heart towards mankind.

*He remains above the feeling of love.*

*Al-Maqsad al-Asna, p.91*

How anyone can be "above" the feeling of love is not at all clear. Love is the greatest of all virtues and anyone who does not feel love in the inmost part of his being must surely be *below* this excellent grace - indeed far below it. But if it is indeed true that God is devoid of such subjective love towards mankind, then men cannot develop love in their hearts towards him especially to the extent where they love him with *all* their hearts, souls and minds. Al-Ghazzali confirms this unfortunate fact by saying of God's love:

*Love and mercy are desired in respect of their objects ONLY for the sake of their fruit and benefit and NOT because of empathy or feeling.*

*Al-Maqsad Al-Asna, p.91*

Men therefore cannot have the greatest of privileges - the actual personal knowledge of God's very own love.

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They can receive *things* from God as tokens of kindness and approval but God *himself* cannot be known. There is no possibility of a mutual expression of love between God and men which can develop and grow into a wondrous communion and fellowship between him and the believer.

In these circumstances we can understand why the Qur'an omits the Biblical command to love God with all our hearts, souls and minds. If men cannot now obtain total assurance of forgiveness of their sins, no such genuine love is possible from them. If love is not part of God's very own being but is only discerned in that which he gives to men; if he has not manifested deep love towards mankind in any specific way; and if he likewise withholds from men any personal experience of his very own love, then no one can possibly love him in return from his heart. There is nothing in him that can awaken the response of such love in men.

Moses and Jesus, however, both declared that the fundamental thing that God requires of men is indeed such heartfelt love. Were these men imposing on their followers an impossible command - or did they, on the contrary, have a greater and deeper knowledge

of God's real nature than we find in the Qur'an? Because of its limited view of God's love, the Qur'an wisely refrains from commanding of men the greatest possible devotion to God - that of inexhaustible love from the heart. Such love could only be expected of men if God himself is far greater than the Qur'an makes him out to be. *He will have to be far more majestic, positively greater, distinctly superior and infinitely more loving if men are to succeed in loving him with all their hearts.*

God can only make such a lofty claim on the devotion of men justly if he is prepared right now to give them forgiveness of sins, reveal through some act of love that he is positively worthy of that love, and graciously extend to men the full personal knowledge of this love. If he expects of men the greatest possible expression of devotion - love from the heart - he must be a God worthy of that love. Let us turn to the Bible to see whether the God of Moses and Jesus is indeed such a God.

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### 3. THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD IN THE BIBLE

One of the striking features of the Christian Bible is the title "Father" for God. He is given no name in the Christian Scriptures (unlike the other major religions of the world where God is always given a name in their holy books) but is always called by this title - either as "the Father" or "our Father" or "God the Father". When one considers the intimate relationship that exists between a father and his children, it is very easy to understand why we have no other name for God. A man is addressed by his name when other men speak to him but his child always calls him "father". He does not address him by his surname for he himself bears his father's name. A name is given to a person to identify him from other men and a child bears his father's name because of the very close relationship between them. But, in view of this intimacy, it is not necessary that a father and his son should address one another by that common name.

Therefore, if God is pleased to become the Father of his people, this must mean that he is willing to enter into such a deep personal relationship with them that no name will be in any way needed to distinguish him from them. Not only so, but the command to love him with all our hearts, souls and minds has the best prospect of fulfilment if God, in deep love for

us, is willing to become our very own Father. What child is there whom his father does not love? As John put it:

*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!*  
1John 3:1

This does not mean that God has taken to himself offspring but rather that he is prepared to draw so near to us in love that the intimate communion which will result from this love between him and true believers can only be compared to that which exists between a loving father and his children.

Now we know that God is Judge of all the earth and that he will deal with the sins of men on the Day of Wrath to come when his righteous judgments will be revealed. If we only know God as Judge of all we can expect no mercy on that day for men are brought before judges to be tried and condemned for their misdeeds. But a father is very different to a judge. While he may, in love and with the purpose of correction, chastise his children, it is forgiveness that really characterises the relationship between him and them. They will always be his children and, while a servant must work to earn his

place in a home, and even then only stays outside in the servant's quarters and can be dismissed at any time, a son has absolute freedom in his father's house. He does not need to work to earn a place there, nor does he reside outside the house. He cannot be dismissed, but remains the heir to all things in his father's house. That which is the father's is his also. We all surely know the expression "one day my son, this will all be yours", symbolising the inheritance the son has to all that the father has built up during his lifetime. The following brief conversation between Jesus and his close disciple Peter brings this fact out very clearly:

*"What do you think Simon?" he asked. From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes - from their own sons or from others?" - "From others", Peter answered. "Then the sons are exempt" Jesus said to him. Matthew 17:25-26*

In this context we must consider the Biblical teaching that God is the Father of the true Christian. If so, it means that the kingdom of heaven is the rightful home of every true believer. Because he is a child of God, he must right now be recognised as a lawful member of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19). He does not have to earn his place there, nor will he ever be

dismissed from this kingdom. Indeed he will never even dwell outside it. He has as much right to a place in God's kingdom as a son has in his father's house. If God is indeed willing to share such grace with his true children, then "what love" indeed is this that he has given us. Jesus made it plain that God indeed wills to have such an intensely deep and personal relationship with the true believer:

*"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Luke 12:32 (KJV)*

This heart-warming promise leads us to the issue that particularly concerns us about the genuineness of love that men must have towards God. We have seen that fear of God's wrath and the uncertainty of his forgiveness destroy the potential for genuine love. Now, if God is prepared to be our Father, then this problem is solved immediately. By becoming our Father he has made us his children and we are therefore set free from the fear of God's wrath

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because we are now already assured that heaven is, and always will be, our real home.

A father always loves his own children in a very special way and no matter how well-disposed he may be towards children generally, he will always have a deeper affection for his own children than for others. The reason is simply that he sees something of himself in his own children that he does not see in others. Even though he may have sons very different to each other in looks and temperament, he will in so many ways, as he looks at them both, be able to say, "*That is me*". So also, if God becomes our Father, we may know that he has a special affection for us, that in some unique way he sees something of himself in us, and for this reason will assuredly never disown us.

No wonder Jesus said "*Fear not*". The fear of punishment has been set aside. We no longer anticipate a judge on the throne of justice before whom we must be condemned to eternal damnation for our sins. We look to a father whose kingdom is our own home and we rejoice in our hope, as children, of sharing and inheriting his glory to be revealed at the last time. Two thousand years ago Jesus instructed his disciples, in praying to God, to call on him as "our Father" (Matthew 6.9). This indicates, not a status to be

longed for in the next age, but one which is presently enjoyed by every one of his disciples. As two of Jesus' followers put it, indeed his two most eminent apostles:

*Now if we ARE children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.*

*Romans 8:17*

*Now we ARE children of God.*

*1John 3:2*

In these circumstances God can be known as Father NOW and he who is a child of God need fear no wrath in the age to come. Judges execute wrath on wrongdoers and separate them from society; masters punish wayward slaves and dismiss them from their service; but fathers love their children and will always do so. So the Christian has no fear of God's wrath but only the knowledge of his love. As Jesus said to his own disciples:

*"The Father himself loves you."*

*John 16:27*

Accordingly the Christian can place all his trust in God, knowing that the deep intimate relationship he shares with him will never be broken - for God is his Father and he is one of his children. Therefore the God of the Bible meets the first requirement of genuine love from the heart. As the father of all true believers we need not be held

in dread. The Day of Judgment will, instead, be a day of glory for the true Christian. God has, in these circumstances, the right to expect those who believe in him to love him genuinely with all their hearts.

There is an implied expression of the love of God for us in his declaration that he is our Father and, as a Father can be known

more intimately by his children than by anyone else, the potential for mutual love here is quite obvious. Let us press on to see more fully what God has done to express his love for us so that we may know that he is indeed our Father, and how he has made it possible for that love to be mutual between him and his children.

#### **4. THE REVELATION OF GOD'S LOVE IN JESUS CHRIST**

We saw earlier that love must be expressive and, in particular, that God must manifest his love for us in some way if we are to love him with all our hearts in return. Now the Christian Bible gives such a manifestation of God's love - indeed the greatest possible expression of it that men could ever expect from him. In the following passage this revelation of God's love is fully set out:

*Dear friends, let us love one another; for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not*

*that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.  
1John 4:7-11*

The striking feature of this passage is the frequent recurrence of the words "God" and "love". The writer is so persuaded of the inseparable link between the two that he sums it up in these words: *God IS Love* (1John 4:8). This means that right in the very heart of God's own personal interest in men rests the deepest possible affection and concern for them. The love of God in this case is clearly *not* to be found solely outside of himself in "fruit and benefit" as al-Ghazzali

suggests. On the contrary it is that love which exists *within* the very nature of God, and it is the love of God himself that is revealed to men in the Gospel. *One can safely say that more is said of God's love in this one short passage in the Bible than in the whole of the Qur'an.* What was it that persuaded the Apostle John of the intensity of God's love for mankind? To what does he appeal to prove this magnificent love of God towards men of which he speaks? What had God ever done to manifest his love in such a way that he could be spoken of as the epitome of love itself? It is simply this:

*This is love: not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*

*1John 4:10*

Herein lies the proof of the depth of God's love towards us. He has done the greatest thing he could possibly do to reveal his love for us - he *gave* willingly his very own Son Jesus Christ to die on a cross for our sins to redeem us to himself. No greater proof of God's love can be given to mankind than this. It is no wonder that John does not appeal to anything further to make his point. He has given the very best possible proof of God's love towards men.

How may we understand the depth of this love? Let us go back in history to the prophet Abraham who was commanded by God to give his only son in a sacrifice. If we ask why God chose to ask his son of him rather than his cattle, goods or land, the answer must be that a man's own son is very different to these other things for he proceeds from his father and is part of the father's very own being. He is accordingly dearer to his father's heart than anything else. Therefore the best way that God could test Abraham's love for him was to command that he sacrifice his son for him. For surely, if Abraham would give his son for God, he would give him anything. This is precisely what mankind can discover about God's love for the human race in the gift of his Son Jesus Christ as a sacrifice that took away our sins:

*He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?* *Romans 8:32*

Furthermore we may well ask whether God would ever ask any man to express his love for him in a greater, more heart-rending way than God was ever disposed to show his love for men. When God asked Abraham to give his son, was this not surely a sign that a reciprocal demonstration of God's

own love would follow in the gift of his Son for us? If not then we must conclude that one man gave a greater proof of his love of God than God has ever given for the whole of mankind in return. The thought is unthinkable. God would never ask any man to do more for him than he was willing to do for men himself. And the wondrous manifestation of his love in giving all he had in the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ is proof sufficient of this.

What better proof can we want of God's love for us? He has given his Son for us - one who proceeds from him - surely, then, he will give us all things with him. If he has, in his deep love, given us the greatest of all gifts, we must assuredly know that he will give us all lesser things as well. Furthermore we see that Abraham, a lowly creature, was prepared to give one like himself for the eternal God of the universe. It was his duty to obey any command God gave him. But what duty was imposed on the eternal Father of the heavens when he gave his Son - one like himself in every way for

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lowly men on earth? What other than infinite love could have motivated such action?

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16*

The Father did not stand idly by as men put his Son to an awful death, nor did he in an act of cruelty make an innocent victim of him. Oh no! Both the Father and the Son, in one united display of wondrous divine love for mankind, endured separation from each other to ensure that many men might be saved from an eternal separation in hell and be brought instead into eternal communion and glory with them. Nothing else but love could have endured the cross with all its horrors. Here we have a visible *expression* of God's love for us. In the gift of his Son he has given a full manifestation of the depth of his love towards us:

*"But God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us".  
Romans 5:8*

*This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 1John 4:9*

Surely men can now respond to God with unlimited love in their hearts. Here is the glory of the Biblical revelation of the love of God in Jesus Christ. It is hardly surprising that the Qur'an has so little to say about the love of God when it denies that God gave his Son to redeem us from our sins. It has denied the greatest manifestation of this love that could ever have been given by God to men. As Jesus said:

*Greater love has no man than this that he lay down his life for his friends. John 15:13*

This is the greatest and most abiding form of love - love that is as strong as death (Song of Solomon 8:6) and cannot be overcome by it. Such love was revealed in Jesus Christ when he willingly laid down his life:

*Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. John 13:1*

Here we have proof, not only of God's inestimable love, but also of the fact that we can depend on it forever. The true Christian will never know the least bit of God's wrath, for he is the eternal object of his immeasurable love. The

willing gift of his own Son was perfect proof of the truth of this promise:

*I have loved you with an everlasting love. Jeremiah 31:3*

The cross of Jesus Christ was a magnificent proof of the eternal love of both the Father and the Son for mankind. Each was prepared to endure the loss of the other's presence - a circumstance which we cannot possibly estimate in our minds - so that we might never be lost. Not only so, but it is little wonder that after the death of Jesus and his resurrection to life again three days later God is only known as Father in the Holy Scriptures. This inexpressible gift shows us more than anything else ever could that God is indeed willing to become our Father. Through the cross he has redeemed all true believers in his Son to himself and has made possible even *now* the forgiveness of all our offences so that we might be transformed from children of wrath, which we are by nature, into children of God.

Not only has God become our Father through that which Jesus has done for us but, being the eternal Son from the Father, he has in fact revealed God himself to us as well:

*"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." John 14:9*

Therefore, not only do we see God's love made manifest in the gift of his Son Jesus Christ but we also have the glorious privilege of seeing in him the very personification of God's love. We are able, in all that Jesus said and did, to obtain a very full knowledge of the love of God for us. For no man ever loved as this man did. No deity of any other religion compares with him in his inexhaustible love for men. He lived for them and he died for them. His whole life was a living expression of love. He never once avenged himself on his enemies but loved them to such an extent that he even prayed on the cross for them in these words:

*"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."* Luke 23:34

In observing their master over the course of three years the disciples had witnessed such a remarkable revelation of love that he was able to say to them on that last night he was with them:

*"A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."* John 13:34

He ordered them to love each other as he had loved them. The world had never seen such depth of love as it saw in this man. Therefore, when he commanded

his disciples to love one another in the same way that he had loved them, it was indeed a new commandment because the standard of this love was such as the world had never known before. Even others, who were not his disciples, when they saw how he grieved over the loss of one of his followers through an untimely death, said:

*"See how he loved him!"*  
John 11:36

We have, therefore, in the life of Jesus a wondrous example of the measure of the Father's love for us. As Ramsey, a former Archbishop of Canterbury, once put it so well: *God is Christ-like, and in him there is no un-Christ-likeness at all.* This is an incredible statement. Yet in no other way can the extent and the One whose image the Son bears (as we say in a proverb, "Like Father, like son") - therefore that love which was so great which the Son fully expressed in his life and death was nothing more or less than the Father's own love for us. Not only so, but the Son lived among men and was known by them. Surely, therefore, if the Father was revealed in the Son, then anyone who truly knew him knew his Father also (John 14:7). This means that we can not only have the magnificent privilege of beholding the love of God for us in the gift of his Son - a fact which demands the only reasonable

response that men can give to this revelation of love, namely that we love him in return with all our hearts - but also that we can have the wondrous joy of actually KNOWING the love of God *within* our very own hearts. God himself has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ - by this we can not only perceive the expression of his love for us but also gain opportunity to actually experience that love

within us. This leads us to our last consideration - the way by which God's love has become mutual between him and men - something which not only gives us potential to express heartfelt love for God but even to develop it to the full through the experience of his love for us in our own hearts.

## **5. KNOWING GOD'S LOVE THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Because God is our Father, we are able to have genuine love in our hearts towards him. Through his great work in his Son Jesus Christ we have seen how worthy he is of that love. But now, through the Holy Spirit (which is given to every true believer in Jesus Christ) we are able to actually experience his love for us within our hearts. As the Apostle Paul put it:

*Hope does not disappoint us,  
because God has poured out  
his love into our hearts  
by the Holy Spirit whom  
he has given us.  
Romans 5:5*

What a wonderful statement this is. God's love has actually been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which is given to every one at that moment that he turns and puts his faith in Jesus, seeking

salvation in him alone. Therefore, not only do we behold God's love for us in the gift of his Son but we can actually experience it within our own souls through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. This principle of our adoption as children of God through Jesus Christ and our living experience of this relationship in the Holy Spirit was summed up by Paul in these words:

*But when the time had fully  
come, God sent his Son, born of  
a woman, born under law, to  
redeem those under law, that  
we might receive the full rights  
of sons. Because you are sons,  
God sent the Spirit of his Son  
into our hearts, the Spirit who  
calls out: 'Abba! Father!'  
Galatians 4:4-6*

Here we have the climax of the revelation of God's love towards us. We have become children of God through the work of Jesus Christ whom God sent into the world to save us from our sins. But now, by sending the Spirit of his Son into our *hearts*, he has made us conscious right within our beings of our status before him. Not only are we children, we *know* we are children. We have been brought into the very same eternal, intimate communion that the Father and the Son have shared with each other from all eternity. Just as Jesus was able to call on his Father in heaven with an expression of intense intimacy, namely "*Abba, Father*" (Mark 14:36), so we have now been brought, by the mercies of God, into this same intimate relationship. ("*Abba*" is a Hebrew word which means "Father" but which is not translated into English because we have no corresponding word in our language which can possibly express the intimacy and closeness denoted by this word in Hebrew). Sufi Masters of old claimed to know the hundredth name of God (there are ninety-nine *al-asma al-husna*, "beautiful names" of God according to traditional Islam) but, in our view, *if there is indeed another name of God which is missing from the ninety-nine, it is not the hundredth name but the first - namely this one: Father.*

Within our very own hearts God has made us conscious of our relationship with him. As Paul put it:

*When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.*

*Romans 8:15-26*

Christians, through the Holy Spirit, are able to call on God as their Father, a title which represents their relationship with him as no other really can.

The Holy Spirit within us has made us particularly aware of the fact that God is now our Father and we, therefore, call on him as such out of the deep knowledge of the love that he has for us. He is our Father in the very closest manner that he could be and through his Spirit he has impressed this fact very surely on us. All this has been done through the redemption which he set forth and accomplished through his Son Jesus Christ. By dying for our sins to cleanse us from all evil Jesus has made it possible for us to fully enjoy this new relationship.

*For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.* *Ephesians 2:18*

Through him the Christian has obtained access to this grace in which he now stands. The love of

the Father, made manifest in the Son, has now become our own personal possession through the Holy Spirit which he has given us. Jesus himself urged his disciples to strengthen and develop this love in their hearts:

*"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love."* John 15:9

We cannot tell how deeply the Father, through the Son, desires that we should know this love in our own hearts. When Jesus prayed to his Father in heaven on the last night he was with his disciples he made it clear that his whole purpose in coming to earth was to make this love real to them:

*"I made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them, and that I myself may be in them."* John 17:26

Ten days after the ascension of Jesus to heaven his disciples first received the Holy Spirit. From that day the personal knowledge of God's love has become available to all men. All who turn to him in faith and love through his Son Jesus Christ will not fail to discover the joy of salvation that accompanies the consciousness of this love in our hearts. As Jesus said to his disciples again on the last night he was with them:

*"The Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from the Father."* John 16:27

Here, then, we find the final proof of God's love towards men. By becoming our Father he has made it possible for us to express genuine love towards him without fear of his wrath in our hearts. He has shown his love to us in a remarkable way by giving his Son Jesus Christ to redeem us from our sins. By giving us his Spirit he has made it openly possible for that love to become thoroughly mutual between him and us. In turn we are now able to truly love him with all our hearts, souls and minds. He is worthy of such love and has made it possible for us to express it to the full.

What will a man offer to God in return for such love? Can he give anything to compare with it? After all that God has done for us, can we honestly believe that we can merit favour with him through our own half hearted, feeble religious efforts?

*Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned.*  
Song of Solomon 8:7 (KJV)

God does not want from sinners their pilgrimages, prayers and pious devotions, and various religious duties mixed through and through with the evils they think and do every day. If we hope to obtain his good pleasure by anything we do on our own account, while we casually overlook the sins we commit, we scorn utterly the love he has revealed to us.

The Father wants none of your efforts - he wants YOU. He desires that you respond to this glorious manifestation of his love. This wondrous revelation of the love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit has God may obtain from us that which *alone* is acceptable to him. He wants us to become his children and to love him with all our hearts, souls and minds. Any good work of grace or religious deed that flows out of such love is acceptable to him. But no work other than this can ever merit acceptance with him.

**The Father wants  
none of your efforts  
- he wants YOU**

So many offer religious works to God with the hope of thereby obtaining his approval and

forgiveness, yet they will never be sure if it is enough. Besides, how can our paltry efforts, wrapped in the multitude of sins that we commit every day, ever possibly merit his approval?

God has provided a better and more certain way of gaining his commendation. He who turns away from his own works and trusts in Jesus Christ instead obtains forgiveness of his sins and newness of life. The true Christian dies in the assured knowledge of God's love and favour. Will you not rather turn to him who can save your soul? God stretches out his hand to you in eternal love - will you not clasp it and obtain the forgiveness God is freely offering you? Will you not believe in his Son who died for you so that you can become a child of God? Will you not receive the Holy Spirit so that, like an orphan, you can experience his warm embrace and know in your heart that God is your Father?

*We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. 1John 1:3*

<sup>1</sup> Acquittal = discharge, release; also used in a legal sense

<sup>2</sup> Unilateral = undertaken or done by or on behalf of one side, party, or faction only





## Now it is your turn:



1. Why is it our duty to keep God's laws and commands?
2. Why is it absolutely important for us to know for sure that our sins have been forgiven?
3. Explain the three basic principles of love in your own words.
4. How does the hadith about the creation of Adam clearly illustrate Allah's failure to show love towards mankind?
5. In your own words explain the difference between the Qur'anic attribute "al-wadud" (=the Loving One) and the Biblical statement "God is love".
6. Write a short response to the idea "God would never ask any man to do more for him than he was willing to do for men himself".
7. In your opinion, which is the one name missing in the ninety-nine "beautiful names of God"?
8. Complete the following question: "...how can our paltry efforts, wrapped in the multitude of sins...".

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