

Women & More

The Philanthropy of God

September 5, 2013

Monday, June 29, 2009, had clearly begun for these winged friends with artful flight in search—and reward—of some daily crumbs of bread. The two sparrows in my path, however, were not in flight; they were fallen. One lie on its back with stick-thin feet in the air, beak closed and only slight movement from its tiny chest, while its companion stood dazed with its beak wide open.

What was clear was that they'd hit the large plate glass doors in mid-flight and were stunned into dying. I thought about God knowing these sparrows' plight, and then I passed on through the hospital doors to my destination, supposing that maintenance would scoop them up and make quick work of their disposal.

And as God so often does, he allowed my Bible reading just a day or so later to be right on that topic in Matthew 10 where Jesus is talking about sparrows: ²⁹*“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. ³⁰And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”* Luke 12:6 also recounts: *“Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. ⁷Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; **you are worth more than many sparrows.**”* Notice that in these synoptic gospel passages, the subject really isn't about sparrows at all; it's about us!

“God loves us: Personally. Powerfully. Passionately. Others have promised and failed. But God has promised and succeeded. He loves us with an unfailing love. And his love—if we let it—can fill us and leave us with a love worth giving.”

Max Lucado

God is the premier philanthropist; He excels at it, because he invented it! And his benefits to us are lavish. God is the supreme benefactor—philanthropist—because before ever he created man and woman, his plans for us were wrapped in his beneficence! *Webster* defines philanthropy as 1. goodwill toward all people—promotion of human welfare. 2. a charitable act or gift. And *Roget's Thesaurus* adds: friendship, charity, virtue, giving and magnanimity (charitableness, benevolence and philanthropy).

♥**READ through:** Psalm 103—**all this and Jesus too!**

Human philanthropists will have varied and often self-serving reasons for their giving, perhaps with some care and compassion tucked in. But what was God's **motivation** for such extravagance? *“For God so loved...that he gave.”* Agape' is unconditional and unbounded, and it is defined in 1 Corinthians 13:4 *“Love (agape') is patient; love is kind.”* And it operates in the order that it is defined.

First, agape' is *patient*—long-suffering—represented in the Old Testament's hundreds of years of God's *patient* love to his rebellious people who had a fascination with the gods of other nations—they were idolatrous. As the Nation of Israel embraced rejection of Jehovah God, judgment came at the hand of other nations. Then silence from their benefactor for hundreds of years. Where had God gone? His silence must represent his displeasure. Would he ever exhibit beneficence again? Would he keep his promise of Messiah—of Savior?

Then, the New Testament opens with the presentation of God's *kindness*—the second component of agape'—Jesus is introduced through his genealogy, which would establish Old Testament prophecy and its fulfillment. And then Matthew details the account of Jesus birth, life, death and resurrection: the Son-rise of Scripture. It is the *kindness* of God that draws men to repentance, says Romans 2:4. **So, God's enduring *patience* was followed by his extreme *kindness*—agape' unleashed!**

Add to that charity and goodwill toward all people and the promotion of human welfare through his charitable act of **redemption**—with **his magnanimous gift of Jesus!** How far would he go? God would go to the ends of the earth—when Jesus died—to exert his philanthropy. His gift of **redemption** extended to the unlovely and unworthy and surpasses all benevolence ever!

Isaiah 43:1 (Isaiah is speaking of the Nation of Israel, and of us—His people)
"Fear not for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine."

Ephesians 1:3-14 describes the lavishness of God's philanthropy to us:

*"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. **In love she predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ**, in accordance with his pleasure and will. ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace, which **he has freely given us in the One he loves**. ⁷**In him we have redemption** through his blood, **the forgiveness of sins**, in accordance with the riches of God's grace **that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding**. ⁹And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.*

*¹¹"In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹²in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were **marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit**, ¹⁴who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory."*

The Trinity was equally involved in our beneficence: There's the work of the Father in planning our salvation (vv. 3-6); the work of Christ in accomplishing our salvation (vv. 7-12); and the work of the Spirit in securing it (vv. 13-14). Because God has blessed us so much—gone to such great lengths and depths to **redeem** us—Paul calls on us to Praise God the Father for his marvelous blessings! So our message is the cross—“*we preach Christ crucified*” 1 Corinthians 1:23—and the Spirit teaches us to proclaim that message in plain terms 1 Corinthians 1:17-18. **The power of the Christian gospel is in that message!** “*He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit...*” **Titus 3:5.**

♥Her name probably meant ‘bitterness’ and she would have her share of it. She was dripping with sin, possessed with not one but seven demons. What had they done with her body, to her mind, in her spirit? And what were their plans for her soul? Sometimes characterized as a prostitute, there was never proof of that—only that she had been a demoniac: indwelt by seven demons intent on her full and final destruction.

When Mary Magdalene met Jesus, he delivered her of these hellions—these cohorts of Satan. Her invisible but unbearable chains fell off and her mind cleared up; the eyes of her spirit saw Jesus and her soul soared! In Luke 8:2 her conversion is mentioned: “*The twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: **Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out**; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.*”

Only the 12 disciples are mentioned more than certain women: Mary Magdalene being one. But the other mentions of Mary are of her meeting the personal needs of Jesus and his disciples, and as a witness of the many miracles of Jesus. She was present at the cross to witness his passion, and then at the tomb with the other women. Mary was rapturously rewarded as the first to see the risen Christ, and she was commissioned by him to go and tell the disciples of his resurrection and that he would meet them all in Galilee. **Mary Magdalene was lavishly given a miracle, a ministry and a message!**

What should be our response to God's beneficent love to us? Our response should replicate Mary's response. She loved the Lord with all her heart, soul and mind—the very parts that he had redeemed from the domination of demons earlier. See, the more that we have been released from, the more that we tend to love our **releaser, redeemer**. God is in the cleansing business and not the white-wash business. Scripture tells each and every one of us how we're to love God—with all that we are and with all that we have—our heart, soul and mind.

God wants to give each of us the **miracle** of new birth, a **ministry** to hurting and needy people, and the **message** of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost!

Mary gave the rest of her life in her Lord's service and for his witness. She embraced him and enjoyed his fellowship—up front and personal—ministering to him and to his disciples. She was a witness to the miraculous, but endured the heartbreak of the crucifixion, and then the loss of finding the empty tomb—the false label of 'prostitute' following her. There's cost to loving the Lord this way. It will certainly cost us the love of the world: Not everyone will love us for loving the Lord.

Nothing is more costly than loving...except not loving!

► Not everyone will receive God's beneficence. Look at the awful sin of unbelief: The Pharisees did not believe in Jesus? These 'vipers'—as Jesus once referred to them—were absolutely full of themselves and stuffed with the laws that they had down to a science and regularly punished others for not keeping. They were all about the 'law' and their own enforcement of it—to the extent that they would charge the Son of God with breaking the 'law' of the Sabbath.

In Matthew 12:14, 24, just after Jesus had restored the withered hand of a man sitting inside the synagogue, Scripture says in verse 14: "*But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.*" Again, right after Jesus healed a blind and mute, demon-possessed man, and directly after the astonished people had said, "*Could this be the Son of David?*" the Pharisees said in verse 24: "*It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.*"

The very demon possession that Mary Magdalene had experienced joyful release from by the Lord Jesus, and which had compelled her to love Him for life with her life, was now being charged against Jesus by the wicked Pharisees. They said Jesus dispensed demons by the power of demon possession. Can you even imagine?

Unbelief is wicked! Don't miss this: The wicked and unbelieving of this world, today—and, even professing Christians—will charge the repentant sinner and devoted follower...of emotionalism, over spiritualization, lack of self-esteem, using God as a crutch, and of just taking this God 'thing' way too far! They will ask the devil's 'if' questions: If God is love, than why is there suffering in the world? Is not the answer staring the asker in the face: **The world is suffering because of the awful, wicked, murderous, rampant-ness of unbelief!** ◀

God tells believers how to respond to His great love: Matthew 22:37-39 “*Jesus replied, ‘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. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’*” God would have believers—his followers—to love him in return for the love He first gave us, and to love others with agape’.

Because human love will not go-the-distance that this command refers, we must learn agape’, because the best of our love—*storge*’ (familial love) *phileo* (brotherly love)—has limits. Our love will not love God with ‘all’ our heart, mind and soul—it will hold back. Our love does not suffer patiently for others, and then exhibit genuine kindness on top of that. Our love can be kind, yes, and our love may be patient. But to wait for someone for a very long time—to endure, to suffer for years and years someone’s abuse, or repayment of debt, or lingering, cantankerous illness, or criticism, or whatever it is, and then to be kind in response...is agape’. This is how we will know that we are practicing agape’.

Luke 6:27-28 “*But I tell you who hear me; Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*” Verse 31 “*Do to others as you would have them do to you. 32 If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ love those who love them.*” Remember that God never asks us to do anything that he intends for us to do without him. God is love (agape’), and we will need Him (Agape’) to do all this!

*“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.*

*¹⁰This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us
and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”*

1 John 4:9-10

We will never ‘be love’ like God is.

But because we have been the benefactors of his love,

we can practice loving ‘like’ he does!