

# Episode 245

## **Shea Houdmann**

Welcome to the Got Questions Podcast. Gwen, the Manager of Volunteer Services, and one of our Associate Editors, and Nelson, the Director of Video Content, are joining me again today to continue our series on what are the attributes of God? Today we're going to be covering what does it mean that God is love, and then we're also going to be covering mercy and grace. It's interesting, are those actually attributes, or are they responses to God's attributes of love? So God is love, this is one of the few attributes in Scripture where there is a verse that specifically says God is love, and you'll find that, I think, twice in 1 John chapter 4. So Gwen, in your studies and preparation for this, what does the Bible mean when it says God is love?

## **Gwen Sellers**

Yeah, well, I think you brought up 1 John 4, so let's just read some of that. It says, Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us.

## **Gwen Sellers**

So I think when we say God is love, that's an essential aspect of his nature, like all of God's attributes are, obviously. So in Greek, which was the original language for 1 John 4, the word there used for love is agape, and that refers to this self-sacrificial love that acts on behalf of the other. And so you see that when it talks about, in this God's love is manifested for us, that he sent his only Son. So when I think of God is love, what I think most of is, wow, he chose to create us in his image, and then he chose to, at great expense to himself, save and rescue us. So it's just this whole idea of God acting on behalf of another. And yeah, and I mean, we've seen tons of examples of God's love being displayed because it's obviously like a central part of who he is, so of course it's displayed all the time. Nelson, how would you define, when we say God is love, like how would you define that?

## **Nelson Domingues**

I mean, this is one of the characteristics, attributes of God that is like so, I think, difficult to define, honestly, because I feel love has changed almost like

definitions through the times, and when we think about love, we have an idea of what love might be, but a lot of times people confuse love with passion, they confuse love with just pure kindness, they confuse love even sometimes with lust, and all sorts of different things where they don't quite know what a true definition of love might be.

### **Nelson Domingues**

And when I think about love in itself, like the definition of love, I think about self-sacrificing, unmerited care, and favor. I think love puts other first. Love is willing to show self-sacrifice, to do things for others, even though it costs them greatly, and it's for their benefit, for their good, and it's not because they deserve it, it's because you love them. And when we think about this type of love, I think it's shown in so many different ways. One of the ways is in a parent who may have a child, and that child has not yet said a word. Not yet done anything at all. In that very first breath, that very first cry, or anything like that, all of a sudden there's this love, right? And this parent who knows nothing of this child, of the future, of what they'll do, what they'll say, how they'll act, the type of person that they'll be, this parent has this unconditional love that God has instilled within us, because we're created in God's image. He's put this love in us as well to love others as the scripture commands us to, and all of a sudden we have this love for this child that we can hardly define except to say that I'll defend the child with my life. I'll do all I can to make their life better. I'll make the sacrifices. I'll put in the work. I'll count myself less than so that I can raise them up. And so when we think about love, think about that.

### **Nelson Domingues**

It's the same way it should be in marriage. Marriage is a partnership that God has created for us, and in that type of love, we are, again, we're self-sacrificing. We are lifting up our spouse. We are helping them be, in my case, the woman that my wife was created to be, or in someone else's case, the man that their husband was created to be, and so we see that love, again, self-sacrificial love and helping others unmerited favor.

### **Nelson Domingues**

And so when we think about God's love, it's all that and like so much more, and this is one of these attributes that is an incredible attribute of God, even in Old Testament times and other times and throughout history for a God to love the people was strange. They would have to work to receive that God's affection in many other religions. They would have to do service. They would have to give sacrifice, basically just so that the God would be kind to them. But then we have the God of the scriptures who says he loved us even before we loved him is unbelievable that, again, and it's even more

unbelievable when you think about that he knows us completely. He knows who we are, what we've done, what we will do, our future, and yet, while we yet regret our sin, he showed his love for us, and I think it is an incredible attribute of God, one that helps me to see him in a light that brings awe and wonder, and I can see why the angels would cry out, holy, holy, holy is he because this love that he has for his people among his other attributes is simply incredible.

### **Nelson Domingues**

And when I think about his love and I think about all those things, and I feel like I'm at a loss because I feel like my definitions of what God's love is I can't even express it well enough to do justice to it, and so, but luckily, scripture has lots of passages where it talks about God's character, God's love, and how it looks like, and I think that's what we get to read about a lot in scripture, about different verses that talk about his love for people, that talk about his compassion for people, and so, yeah, that's one of the exciting things, I think, to look in scripture, to look in his love, and, again, I feel like this attribute is one where I'm a little bit at a loss to give a full definition, but at the same time, I am in awe of how great his love is for me and for others as well.

### **Shea Houdmann**

When I look at God's love, and Nelson, you didn't quote it exactly, but you definitely alluded to it with like a Romans 5:8 that God demonstrated his love for us while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. He's not just loving the lovable, he's loving the unlovable. Gwen alluded to it in her definition, the unconditional aspect, the self-sacrificial aspect. There's nothing in this for God. He's doing it out of his own love for his creation for us as his children.

### **Shea Houdmann**

And then, Nelson, you said something else at the beginning about how God's love is often confused by our modern definitions, and that can cause confusion, and some of the questions we'll get about God's love is like, well, how can you say that this activity is sinful? God is love. Or how can you say that God could possibly send someone to hell because God is love? So they use God's love, it's like overrides anything in the Bible they don't like. Nelson, what would you say? What's the solution to that? What's the answer that we get when people say, well, God can't judge sin because God is love?

### **Nelson Domingues**

I think it's in his love that we even have an opportunity to speak these denigrating words against God, the fact that he has patience with us. God's love doesn't supersede his justice. It doesn't supersede or overwrite or push aside his need to have this hatred towards sin. It doesn't push any of those

things away. Just because God loves us, and that's a very real thing, right? He sent his only son because he loved the world, right? And he loved every one of us. Yet, in his love, he still sees wrongdoing. He still sees sin, and he still is a God of justice, and he still has wrath and anger towards sin and sinners.

### **Nelson Domingues**

And so I would, you know, if someone were to say to me, well, you know, God is love, he would never condemn a loved child. I would say at the same time, well, yes, he is love, and it's in his mercy and his grace, and we'll get to it in a little bit, that he has patience with us who sin and who rebel and who go against him. And he longs that we will see our sin and repent of it and turn towards him, because at the end of the day, we will stand before God, and we'll have to account for our words, for our actions, for our life. And if our sin hasn't been wiped clean by the blood of Jesus Christ, when we put our faith in him, then we stand in our sin, and we'll be judged by our sin, and we will face condemnation. And even though God loves us, and scripture talks about that he doesn't desire that anyone should perish, even though he loves us, he will still be the God of who he is. He will still enact justice. And so when those people who confuse his love for absolute approval of everything in their life, I would say that's not love.

### **Nelson Domingues**

And a good definition, you know, a good way to picture that would be if you had a person that you loved very much in your life who would say maybe they're a drug addict, and they are addicted, desperately addicted to heroin or something else, and they come crying to you, begging to you, shaking in pains from withdrawal, and saying, I need this drug in my life. If you love me, if you care for me, all those things, you go out and get it for me, or you'd be okay with me persisting in this habit. And it would be out of your love that you would say no, and it'd be out of your love for them that you might turn them over to the police, or turn them over to a rehabilitation center, or anything like that, that you would get into a hospital, things like that. Your love would care for them, but not approve of this behavior that's destroying them.

### **Nelson Domingues**

And that's the same thing with God's love for us. He loves us so much that He doesn't approve of behavior that destroys us and that separates us from Him. And so that's how I would answer those types of questions. He loves you, but He does not love your sin. And He is so holy and pure that He can't bear to be around that sin. And unless we confess our sin and see it the way He sees it, we have a world of wrath in front of us that we don't have to. And that's the amazing thing about Scripture, that we don't have to sit in that wrath,

and that it's because of His love that He's given us a way out, that He's given us His Son, Jesus Christ. And so that's a perfect picture of the true love of God to me.

### **Gwen Sellers**

I think that's a great visual. As you were talking earlier, you mentioned how the love of a parent for a child or the love of a husband for a wife, and both of those are examples that God uses in the Bible to explain His relationship with people. I think when we consider God as our Creator, His ways are actually best for us. It's that whole idea of whoever built the car knows how the car works and runs, so you want to follow their instructions. You want to put gasoline in the tank, not water, or else it's just not going to work. And so I think the same for us. When God created us and He knows us intimately.

### **Gwen Sellers**

I mean, if you read Psalm 139, wow, God knows everything about you. So our sin is an affront to a holy God, but it's also just us causing ourselves pain and death, and God doesn't want that. So of course He should have some thoughts about that and act on that. So that example of the drug addict, yeah, you're not going to give somebody you love the very thing that's harming them. You're going to withhold that from them.

### **Gwen Sellers**

And also, like Hebrews 12 talks about God disciplines those He loves like a good father does to a son. I think as parents, when you see your kids doing something that's going to lead to a bad end, you try to change it beforehand. And so like, yeah, you inflict some pain so that they will go the right direction so that ultimately they'll flourish. And I also think about, you know, love and truth. There really is no love apart from truth. And I do think that our culture confuses that. And like Shea said, we do tend to think of love as just you accept and approve and celebrate everything about me. But that's not genuine love. Genuine love is based on truth, like for your actual good. And approving everything about me isn't for my actual good. Leading me toward truth is for my actual good.

### **Shea Houdmann**

Love that balance, Gwen, of love and truth. Ephesians 4:15 is speaking the truth in love. You can speak the truth, but if it's not spoken in love, it won't have the desired impact. You can speak love, but it doesn't actually help someone if it's not the truth. So there's that biblical balance, not just how we speak, but how we treat, even God's love for us is love and truth for who we actually are and what we actually need, rather than just giving us everything we want or everything that we ask for. And that's a huge distinction for us to remember about God's attributes, as we've said multiple times throughout the

series, is that all of God's attributes are infinitely true. So God's holiness impacts his love. God's righteousness impacts his love. All of his attributes. And God's love, then vice versa, impacts his holiness. God's love impacts his justice and so forth.

### **Shea Houdmann**

It's interesting, though, in any study of God's attributes, you get to a point where you read different books or see different articles that talk about those attributes, and the lists are different. Some lists will have certain attributes listed. Other ones won't have those. And so mercy and grace are kind of in that category. Well, of course, we believe that God is merciful and God is gracious. But the question is, are these attributes or are these outflows of God's attributes, specifically his attribute of love?

### **Shea Houdmann**

And this may help you understand what the difference would be. Typically, attribute is something that God was and always has been from eternity past. Before he created the universe, before there was any other being other than him, was God that. So in that sense, was God gracious and merciful when there was no other being in the universe? And so some people will say, no. Other people will say, yes, he was. But there's just no one to show those attributes to. So I don't know that there is an explicitly biblical answer that solves this. But one thing that we can trust in and rejoice in is that God is merciful, God is gracious, and these two things flow from his love.

### **Shea Houdmann**

So one common definition we'll Got Questions of, what's the difference between mercy and grace? And we typically say God's mercy is God not giving us the judgment that we do deserve, and grace is God giving us good things that we don't deserve. But Gwen, I know we've had this conversation before. It's much deeper than that, isn't it?

### **Gwen Sellers**

Yeah. So in English, the word mercy, it does include that. So in English, the word mercy refers to showing compassion or forgiveness when it's in one's power to harm. And in Hebrew, so the language of the Old Testament, the Hebrew root where it's translated mercy is for compassionate. And in Greek, it's also the root for have compassion or show mercy. So it's not just like, oh, I could judge you, but I'm not going to punish you. It's this compassionate care for people.

### **Gwen Sellers**

And I think we see God's mercy even in places that aren't judgment. Jesus, you'll see, had pity. He had mercy on the people when they were hungry, and he fed them. Or we think about God being merciful to the Israelites when

they're in Egyptian slavery. It's this desire. I guess it's showing that you care for someone, you understand their struggle, and you act. And so I think that also when you think of mercy as a spiritual gift for people, and so that's not just like, oh, you're merciful that you could punish a bunch of people, but you don't. We think of the gift of mercy as those people who are showing compassion and care. Nelson, do you have other thoughts on defining mercy?

### **Nelson Domingues**

Scripture is packed full of mercy. To Shea, what you were saying, is it an attribute or not? And that is a tough question. I think these things flow. I don't have the answer. I'm not going to pretend to give you the answer right now to that. But when I think about his love, I do think that mercy and grace, just like all his other attributes, flow from love. And I think grace and mercy are part of that. I think justice is part of that.

### **Nelson Domingues**

I think Scripture talks about when we're harmed, that God sees the harm done to us and enacts justice on our behalf. And I think that's important. And for those people who have been harmed in their life or treated unfairly in their life, to know that there is a final judgment and that there is justice to be had. And that God, Scripture talked about vengeance is mine, declares the Lord. And I think that's an act of love for me to say that I saw you be treated unfairly.

### **Nelson Domingues**

And so getting back to mercy, I feel like this definitely flows out of that as love again. And in Scripture, we see so many instances where God shows his mercy to us, even shows his mercy to sinners, right? In so many different ways. In Matthew 5, verse 45, the second part says, for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. I mean, that is a merciful God who would do that because it would be very easy for him to make the crops of the unjust not grow and the crops of the just to grow. It's very easy for him to see me one day where I am not measuring up to where I'm supposed to be and for him to enact immediate justice. And he doesn't. He shows kindness. He shows mercy. I have some passages of Scripture, we talk about like Romans, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And Romans 6, that was Romans 3.23. Then Romans 6.23 says, for the wages of sin is death, right? That's what we deserve for who we are and what we've done. We deserve death. I don't think we quite sometimes don't get the picture of how wicked we are and how deserving of God's wrath, you know, we are.

### **Nelson Domingues**

When I think about mercy, I have to look at why. What shows his mercy? He shows his mercy to me in many ways. One of them is I'm not judged

immediately for the sin that I do. There's an aspect of mercy there, particularly before I even knew him, before I put my faith in Jesus Christ. There's mercy there, right? It says, for the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. I mean, that's an amazing act of grace.

### **Nelson Domingues**

And it's so, I am, again, in all of the attributes of God, and I wish I could explain them better when I talk about these things. And I feel like these things are just, they should leave us in awe, and they should leave us to be a people who are so thankful that God is patient with us, that God shows us his mercy for us. And I think when we have these things done to us, and he calls us likewise to do those same things for others. I mean, we should be a better people knowing how much we've been forgiven, how much debt of ours has been let go, and we should turn around, parable, and be able to forgive others and have mercy on others in just the same way that God has demonstrated his mercy and his grace towards us.

### **Gwen Sellers**

Well, I think that's such a great point of, like, not only, I mean, you know, just like as humans created in the image of God, we should be reflecting him. But especially as believers, like, we are called to image him to the world, to be reflections of who he is. And yeah, so you're right. Also, that having received it, having received mercy, we should in turn be merciful. Having been loved, we should love. Yeah, so all of God's attributes. I mean, you're right, that whole incomprehensibility thing. There are no words to adequately convey what it really means. But wow, it should so transform our hearts that it then transforms our lives.

### **Nelson Domingues**

We have to really give ourselves the credit we deserve and how sinfully deprived we are and have been born in sin. Everything we do, even our best efforts as sinners before we knew Christ are no good. It's as filthy rags, right? Scripture reminds us, like, it's anything that we can do that's kind of okay, that seems nice to the world. Even yet, if we're in sin, it's utterly disgusting to God. And the fact that he puts up with that from anyone for any amount of time is incredible. And we know the depravity in ourselves. We know the depravity in the world. And to think that he's been putting up with that for millennia, like, just demonstrates his ongoing continual mercy that we get to see every moment of the day. His love, his mercy, his grace are coming through every single moment of the day. And who are we ever to withhold those things then from others? If at every second God is showing us mercy, every second he's showing us his love and grace, the moment we turn around to someone else and think, you should do that. I mean, we, again, as scripture



reminded us and Jesus told, you know, take the plank out of our own eye before we examine the speck in someone else's eye. And when we look at attribute of mercy, this is one of these things where we should have some compassion on those less fortunate. We should have compassion on those who are hurting. We should have compassion on those who don't know Christ and who are lost in sin. That should break our hearts. Not be angered at them, not be disgusted at them. Just because someone sins different than you do, that shouldn't be any reason that you should not work with them and talk with them and lead them to an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. And it's through our mercy, the compassion of others that helps us to be those types of people.

### **Shea Houdmann**

When I think through this episode, stuff we talked about already, first John 4:19 keeps coming to mind. We love because he first loved us. And then thinking of worst example of God's mercy, of someone emulating God's mercy in scripture, it's the parable of the steward who owed the king like a billion dollars. And the king and his mercy just said, you know what? Your debt is gone. I wiped it out. And that same servant goes to someone who owes him like 10 bucks and strangles him and throws him in prison until he pays back the 10 bucks. And that is the exact opposite of what we should do. We have been forgiven of so much. God has been so merciful and so gracious to us. God has shown his love towards us in such powerful ways. And we are therefore to be loving to others.

### **Shea Houdmann**

So maybe I thought a good way to finish off this episode. What's a way, just very practically, that the three of us and then even those who are listening can be emissaries of God's love, mercy, and grace in this world. And to give you two a little time to think it through what you want to share, I'll go first.

### **Shea Houdmann**

And to me, evangelism, sharing the gospel. I think too, one of the name of the people involved, a famous atheist, a comedian once had someone share the gospel with him. And he's not interested in it at all, but he's like, I at least respect the person because how much do you have to hate somebody to not share the gospel with them? I could tell by this person sharing the Christian message with me that he truly loves me and is concerned about me. And in that sense, I respect what he did. So here, as Christians, we believe there is something horribly wrong with this world and everyone in it. And that we know what the solution is, faith in Jesus Christ, his death on the cross and his resurrection, providing for our forgiveness and salvation, eternal home in heaven. So we know the problem, we know the solution. And then how often

do we fail to tell others about that? We see someone who needs this message and we withhold it. I think the fact that God calls us to be evangelists, to share the gospel, to share the love, mercy, and grace of God is such a huge responsibility. And to me, it is a powerful way of declaring God's love by God has loved me in this way and I want everyone else to know about the same love.

### **Shea Houdmann**

So to me, that's a powerful reminder as I was preparing for this episode and just thinking through, just listening to the two of you, it's like, yes, sharing the gospel is perhaps the ultimate example of God's love. So Nelson, how about you go next? What's a practical way that we can be showing and sharing God's love, mercy, and grace with others?

### **Nelson Domingues**

I think what I was sharing a little bit earlier, and I think for me, it stands to be one of the prime examples that caused me to reflect deeply on myself is God's forgiveness and that that's an extension of his mercy and grace and love. Really, I know my sins. I know my wrongs. I know my hypocrisy. I know things that I should have done, things I should not have done. I know those things and God knows them full well. He knows them better than me. And yet, when I go to him and confess my sin, trust in Lord Jesus Christ for my salvation, he wipes away the slate, keeps no records of wrong. It doesn't mean he forgets about them. He means he doesn't count them against me anymore. It also means that he put my sin debt on Jesus Christ to pay on my behalf for me. And that causes me to just well up in thankfulness, just really just be incredibly in awe again of who am I? God would love me this much.

### **Nelson Domingues**

And I think some people struggle with identity. I think some people struggle with their self-worth. I think people struggle with the idea of who they are or who they are in this world. And they think that I'm not good enough or I can't do good enough or I'll never accomplish these things or I don't have these degrees behind my name or I don't have this much money in my bank account or respect from other people. And to you, all I have to say is you have God's love on you and you have his attention and you have his mercy and you have his grace. And that is a far greater gift than anything this world has to offer. To have the opportunity to spend an eternity with Jesus Christ in heaven and to be counted as pure and have our sin washed away. There's no greater gift than that.

### **Nelson Domingues**

Ephesians chapter two verses four and five says, but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead in

our trespasses made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved. We can't really talk too much but grace is being given favor or blessing or kindness that we just don't deserve. That's what grace is and God does it in spades. He gives it to me every single day. And if you're struggling with identity, understand that God has given you that same love, that same mercy, that same grace. Jesus Christ is there and wants to have an intimate relationship with you and God has sent him to do so.

### **Nelson Domingues**

And so I encourage anyone who's struggling with those things just to remember you are unbelievably valuable to God. He has gone through every single length to call you to himself. And don't think anything less and don't let any lies be whispered in your ear by anyone or any thoughts, anything less than that. You're wonderfully made in God's image and he loves you and wants to have a relationship with you.

### **Gwen Sellers**

So as you guys have been talking, first Peter two nine through ten keeps coming to mind. So it says, but you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

### **Gwen Sellers**

And I think that really encapsulates what both of you are talking about. It's like we have been saved so that we can proclaim who God is and so that we can share this incredible message with other people. We were in darkness, now we're in light. We were dead, now we're alive. We were enemies of God, destined for wrath. Now we're children of God and like fully loved, destined for eternity with him. And so being able to share that with other people.

### **Gwen Sellers**

I also love this idea that you weren't a people but now you are. And how that links up with identity. Our sermon on Sunday, it was on Ephesians 2. And talking about how God reconciles people not just to himself but to one another. So Jew and Gentile. You now the Gentiles like were separate, were alienated. But now they they've been brought in. And so that's the prayer that I often have is that God would give me his eyes for other people. So I think for me, one way to practically show his love is, am I paying attention to people? Like am I seeing them as people? Am I taking the time to listen? Do I have God's heart toward them? Am I wanting to tell them truth? To encourage them? To care about them. But really where they are. Not what I want to say. Or what I think they need to know. Or I just need them to do something for

me. But am I really seeing them first as people? And to me that I kind of the biggest challenge of being able to show God's love and show that mercy and compassion and grace is first be with people as people. And then ask the Holy Spirit to give you guidance in how to love them well in that moment and in that season. Ya and I think all of that helps them feel loved the way that God loved us. He knows us intimately. He's affectionate towards us. He cares about our lives. They have meaning. He's the one who gives us meaning and identity. And when we get to reflect that to others I think that's so distinct from our society does and something people are so hungry for.

**Shea Houdmann**

Amen. Well said both of you. So many different applications of God's love and what that means for us and what that means for how we treat others. And we love others because God first loved us. They will know we are Christians by our love. Not an explicit quote from the Bible, but one that's very true none the less.

**Shea Houdmann**

Hope our conversation today about the attribute of love and whether they are attributes we aren't 100% sure, but God's mercy and grace. Hope what we shared today has been helpful for you in understanding what the Bible says these attributes. About how we can apply them and how we treat others. Praise God for his love for his mercy and grace and what that means us. I think that's the heart of what we are trying to get across today. God's love is more than just an emotion. It's not just a feeling. It's not a, it's both a noun and a verb in a sense that it's who God is but also what God does. And that's very important for us to remember.

**Shea Houdmann**

This has been the Got Questions podcast on the attribute of God's love, His mercy, and his grace. Got questions? The bible has answers and we'll help you find them.