

GROWING IN GOD

PODCAST



GIG228 – The Gift of God's Love

Well, Merry Christmas. We are just a few days away from the Christmas celebration for this year. I want to talk to you about the gift that God is giving us in this time, and that is the gift of His own love. As we know with so many religious observances, there is much that can be discussed about Christmas. For instance, because the Western and Eastern Orthodox Churches use different calendars, Christmas is observed on different days. In the Western Church, which uses the Gregorian calendar, Christmas is observed on December 25th; and that is probably what most of you listening to this podcast are used to as the day Christmas is celebrated. But for the Eastern Church, which follows the Julian calendar, Christmas is observed on or about January 7th; it is mostly January 7th, but there are a few branches that celebrate it on various days around that time. Now, if we would look at the Messianic or Hebrew Roots movement churches, we would find that they follow the tradition that Yeshua was born somewhere during the Fall feasts, between the Day of Trumpets and Sukkot, or the Feast of Tabernacles. So, there is a lot that could be said about Christmas, just the confusion of trying to figure out when it is, and how to celebrate it. But rather than attempt to unravel all of the doctrinal and scheduling dilemmas surrounding Christmas, what I am going to focus on in this podcast is what is very personal and important to me: Christmas is about the love of God manifesting to humanity.

I want to read First John chapter 4, verse 9: "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him." What is Christmas? If you are celebrating the birth of Christ, then you are celebrating the manifestation of God's love in us. Now some translations say "among us," or "to us," or other phrases. Maybe it is difficult for them to express this idea of God in us, and God's love in us; but if you read it directly from the Greek, that is what it is saying, "in us." "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world." So the coming of Christ into the world is God manifesting His love in us, and that is really what this is all about. You say, "I thought it was about giving presents and gathering together." Well, all of those things happen; and to me, if they are happening, what we should be doing is what God was doing when He brought Christ into the world, and that is manifesting His love in us. There is no different gift or greater gift, more perfect gift, that can be given for Christmas than the love of God manifest in us. And if we are relating to one another and getting together as family or friends, then what we should be doing is celebrating the fact that God manifests His love in us.

I cannot imagine what the heart of God must really feel in wanting so deeply to get across to humanity how much He loves us on an individual basis. That is what I like about this wording, that He manifested His love "in us"; because that, see, makes it not just something that He did globally to everybody in the world, and you get kind of lost in this big picture of God doing something for the whole world. When He says He manifested in us, that becomes very, very individual – He manifested His love in you. He manifested His love in me. And God is driven, God is so driven, to get us as humans to know and feel and recognize and celebrate His love that He has. It is His whole purpose in all that He does.

You say, "Well, I see in the Scriptures that God comes at times and He is angry. He was angry at Israel. You can see that He comes in judgment." But I am telling you, everything is God's tactic to bring us to an

understanding of how much He loves us. I wish that we could take the time in this season to really bring our walls down, to really open our hearts, to really go back and evaluate our relationship to Him. What is religion all about? What is church supposed to be all about? All of these things, I don't know; we just get so lost in the trappings of everything that has to do with Christmas – with church, with religion, with whatever, the world around us – that we lose sight of the fact that there is only one thing happening during this time that we have here on earth, and that is that God is expending tremendous amounts of energy in order for us, as individuals, to recognize and open up to and receive His love for us. That is what it is all about, and I want us to celebrate His love in this season.

What I would like to do is to go ahead and read all of First John 4, from verse 7 to 21, because it is freighted with this idea of the love of God. Starting at verse 7, he says, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." When we know God, we will love; and that is a big part of what I think God is trying to do. If He can get us to see His love for us, then He can make us become love – love to one another, love to ourselves, love back to Him in worship and service. It is all about the love. It is all about us getting it. If we can receive His love in us, then we will become that love, and thereby everything we do will be an expression of that love.

Verses 8-10 say, "The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him." How do we live? We live in the expression of that love that has manifested in us. "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." What is sin, really? It is separation from God; but it is deeper than that. It is separation from His love for us. And when we get the love of God, when it is really, really, real to us, sin will no longer be an issue; because His love in us will shove those kinds of actions and thoughts and ways out of our lives permanently, for good.

Verse 11, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." Man, the world needs this! We are losing it quickly, we are losing the love for one another. We are seeing manifestations of emotions that are just anti-love, they are the opposite of love; and we are seeing the expression of it in our actions to ourselves and to one another. There is only one thing that can stop it: opening our hearts to receive how much He loves us. He loves us, God so loves us; and therefore, we ought to love one another. And we will love one another – loving one another will not be a challenge when we really receive the love that God has for us. We will love our neighbor as ourself, because that first step will be an amazing revelation to our hearts – when God loves us, how much we will be able, enabled, to love ourselves. Right now, this is very difficult for people in this world, because we are estranged from His love; therefore, people abuse themselves in so many ways, the worst of which is suicide. How much farther can we get from knowing the love of God than to take our own life? Because, as He says, this love of God was manifested in us. He sent His Son into the world that we might live through Him. When we know love, we will know life, and we will live life. We will live life loving ourselves, loving one another, and loving God.

I will read verses 11-16 again: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us." Wow! If we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us. Why are we here together in the earth at this time? Because God is perfecting His love in us as we love and relate to one another, expressing constantly His love for us and for each other. "By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son

to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us." Look at that: "we have come to know." We must know this love that God has, and we must believe in that love which He has for us. "God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."

This reminds me of John 17, where Yeshua, before going to the cross, talks about the oneness, talks about the oneness between Himself and the Father. What made Him and the Father one? Love. The love that God had for Him, the love that He had for God. That love is what welds into oneness; and because of that love and its existence in us, then the ability of oneness exists. So, the one who abides in love abides in God. We become one with God. That is what Christ said, that He and the Father would come and take Their abode in us. Why? Because we *finally* come to the revelation of love that He has for us. I want to abide in God, and I want Him to abide in me. I want to know this love, and believe in this love.

Verses 17-18, "By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love." When you look around, even in the church today, and you see all of this fear and concern over the tribulation, it is like you have just read the book of Revelation one too many times and focused on all the beasts and the difficult things. What are those feelings about the end time showing? They are showing us that we have not been perfected in this love yet. We have not opened our heart to the love; because if we have that love, then we know that there is no fear in love, and perfect love casts out fear – even about the tribulation, even about the end time, even about the devil and all his hordes and all the beasts and everything else. They are all minimized into nothing because perfect love casts out fear; because fear involves that punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.

Verse 19, "We love, because He first loved us." That is how we get it. We open up to Him. We open up to Him and the great, tremendous love that He has. If you are going to celebrate something about Christmas and it being the time in which Yeshua came into this earth, remember the purpose of it was because He was manifesting His love in you. That is why the event of His advent took place.

Verses 20-21, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also." Beautiful verses. These would make wonderful reading around the dinner table at any Christmas celebration. I encourage all of us to make His love the focus of these days ahead of us, the focus and the celebration.

I want to read Ephesians the third chapter, verses 16 through 19. Paul is talking here, and he says,

That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth [see, this love is without measure; but listen to verse 19], and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

Think about this – "to know the love of Christ." Why did Christ come? That the love of God be manifested in us, so that we may know the love of Christ which surpasses human knowledge and understanding. It has to come by opening our hearts to the revelation of what God is beaming at us

through Christ – to know the love of Christ, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God; because God is love, and because His fullness is love, and because that love is imparted into you.

So, “to know” – why do we pursue the knowledge of Christ? Why do we pursue after Christ? We want to know His love, because God sent Him here as an expression of that love. He was manifesting His love on a level for us, because Christ came as a human; and so, God was manifesting His love within a human so that we, as humans, could find a way to open up and receive His love and relate to His love. Since no man has seen God and we cannot relate to Him that easily, God sent His love packaged in Christ, so that if we would receive Him, what we are really receiving is the love of God; and we are filled to the fullness of God – which is what Christ was, right? He was the fullness of God in man.

I want that. I want to be filled to all the fullness of God. I want His love to be absolutely without measure in my heart, beyond a human knowledge and understanding; but an experience that begins with a revelation of Yeshua having come to express that love and fill our hearts with that love until we, as Christ, could be filled to all the fullness of God.

I want to end this podcast with one reminder for us, and that is out of John 3:16. I am sure some of you are going, “When is he going to read John 3:16? When is he going to get there? That is the best Scripture yet!” Okay, here we have it: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” And what is eternal life? The love of God is eternal life, because God is love, and that is eternal.

So, as we give ourselves to this season, let us remember that it was because of God’s great love that Christ was sent to this earth. He was sent to this earth to be the expression of God’s love to us each individually. I tell you, God is driven for us to know and experience His love for us. And the greatest celebration of Christmas would be us opening our hearts to know and receive and experience the love of God.

With this, I would say, have a merry Christmas. Let it be a time for you and your family to be filled to all the fullness of God, as you receive His love into your life.

Amen.