

How God Loves You

(Hosea 11:1-11)

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Introduction

You've heard about the three kinds of love. First is the physical kind of love, sexual love, from the Greek, *eros*, where we get our English word, "erotic." Then there is the brotherly kind of love, from the Greek, *phileo*, where we get our English word, "Philadelphia." There is the divine love, the greater kind of love, *agape* love, which is supposed to be an emotionless self-giving love that seeks the good of others.

But there are serious problems with these definitions. In the Greek version of the OT (LXX), in 2 Sam. 13:1, 4, 15, Amnon "loved" Tamar, his half-sister. The Greek word here is from *agapao*. He was "tormented" with his love for Tamar. His love was an emotional love. Amnon then raped Tamar. His love was a violent, sexual love. But the Greek word used is *agapao*. How can that be a self-giving love? In 2 Tim. 4:10, Demas "loved" the world and deserted Paul.¹ The Greek word there is *agapao*, which is *agape* love. How can that be a self-giving love for the good of the other?

The starting point for understanding the love of God then is not in word studies, but in the text and context. Today, I hope that you will understand from God's Word that God's love is essentially an intensely emotional but sovereign love for His elect. We find this intense, intentional love of God so aptly demonstrated in Hosea 11:1-11—the most endearing passage in Hosea. We shall note only two aspects of the love of God for Israel, which is the same love he gives for you and me, His chosen people in Christ in this age.

The Intense Emotional Element of God's Love (Hos. 11:1-8)

First, God's love is a Parental Love (vv. 1-4). Yahweh has loved Israel as a parent loves a child (vv. 1-2). Doesn't this sound familiar? You know how it feels to call your kids, and they don't come.

When did Yahweh call Israel to him? (v. 1) It was during the time of the exodus (cf. Ex. 4:22). But Yahweh said that the more he called them, the more they went away to follow other gods, the Baals. This means that as early as the exodus from Egypt, the Israelites already carried with them their idolatry—the worship of other gods.

Num. 25:1-3, 9 tells us that the Israelites prostituted with the daughters of Moab, who enticed them to worship Baal-peor. This kindled the anger of Yahweh. Twenty-four thousand Israelites died in a plague sent by Yahweh that day; because they committed prostitution and idolatry with the unbelieving daughters of Moab. (Now that gives you an idea why we encourage believers to marry only believers.) Even up to the time of Hosea, around the latter part of the 8th century B.C.E., they still carried their idolatry with them

Who are the Baals? Baal was a weather-god in Syria-Palestine. He controlled rainfall, agriculture, and productivity. He was also a fertility god. He was supposed to give children to barren couples. Baal was also localized in local shrines—Baal-peor (Hos. 9:10) and Baal-gad (Josh. 11:17). That's why people called them, the Baals. The sinful thing about the Baals is that it is a religion of sex through ritual prostitution. Worshipers would go into a Baal shrine and commit sex there with the cult priestess. The sexual act is expected to cause the Baals to bless the worshipper with good seed and rain for a good crop.²

Israel prostituted herself with this despicable religion. But Israel was married to Yahweh. Israel is joined to Yahweh. To worship the Baals is therefore to commit spiritual adultery. As a wife has sinned against her husband for going with another man, Israel has sinned against Yahweh by her idolatry. It was a grievous sin.

Let me ask you, "Do you still continue the worship of other gods?" Perhaps since the day you got born again, you've been carrying some well-hidden Baal in your life. Do not commit spiritual adultery. Repent your sin and throw them all away. We are the bride of Christ. We are married to Christ. Water baptism shows that you are spiritually joined to Christ. Do not bow down to the Baals of this world.

¹ D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000), 27.

² Robert I. Vasholz, "Hosea," *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 1620.

Look with me in v. 3. The picture here is of Yahweh as a parent teaching his son, Israel, to walk, holding him by the arms. The words, “*I healed them,*” indicates that the Israelites have forgotten how Yahweh has healed them from snake bites and bitter waters (cf. Ex. 15:22-26; Num. 21:6-10).

I read a true story about Mary who was “a devoted wife who deeply loved her husband, but after 8 years and two children he left her for another woman. Her faith in God and her love for her children kept her going. Today, her son is living a sinful lifestyle, and her daughter has abandoned her husband and children. Neither of them will have anything to do with their mother.”³

Can you imagine the same anguish of Yahweh over Israel? He trained them to walk from childhood. He fed them. He healed them. He loved them. He taught them. But they have turned away from Yahweh and turned to other gods. Look at v. 4. These poetic words speak of the love of God, the kindness of God, and the provisions of God for Israel in the exodus and throughout the wilderness journey.

Because of their apostasy, Yahweh warns that Israel shall get back into a new captivity, a new Egypt, but this time, the Assyrian empire (vv. 5-6). In v. 6, the picture here is of the Assyrian sword slashing through the cities of Israel, as divine judgment against her. Yahweh shall use Assyria to destroy Israel’s plans (cf. 10:6).

Have you felt the pain of the hardheadedness of your son or daughter? Yahweh also felt the same way in v. 7. (READ) This is very interesting. Israel shall call God, *el al*, or “God on High,” but it is a false name of God. It appears that the Israelites are approaching God on their own terms, using their own apostate theology—a theology that reflects their turning away from the true theology of God. Since they also worshipped the Baals, it is most probable here that the Israelites mixed their theology of Yahweh with the theology of the Baals,⁴ producing an apostate theology. That’s what happens when you mix biblical faith with non-biblical faith—you produce apostate faith. They still exercised faith, but a false, unbiblical faith.

Second, God’s love is a Passionate Love (READ v. 8). In v. 8, we see the intensely emotional love of God for his chosen. Here we see God questioning himself. Admah and Zeboiim were the other notorious cities of the plain (cf. Deut. 29:23). Like Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim were notorious for their gross depravity and immorality. God destroyed these sinful cities totally and eternally. Thus, God is asking himself rhetorically, how he could ever bring himself to destroy Israel like he destroyed Admah and Zeboiim.

As a parent, have you experienced this? You don’t know what to do with your child, whether to discipline him or to let him go ahead with his sinful ways. But God is not like us. As omniscient God, Yahweh knows the end from the beginning. “*For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose’*” (Isa. 46:9-10, ESV). As the all-knowing God, Yahweh cannot be surprised by anything. For as the sovereign God, Yahweh wills everything to happen. Yet we see here the raw emotion of God.

Herein then is the problem—how can the God who knows the end from the beginning, seem to struggle with his love and emotions? Read with me v. 8. The verb, “recoils” (Heb. *haphak*), is a very interesting word. It means, “to turn (over on the other side): dish 2 Ki. 21:13, hand (back and forth); 2. (upside down): overturn: throne Hag. 2:22.” (Holladay)

Do you see an amazing character about the love of God here? I see here the love of God and the justice of God at play. While God wants to punish Israel for her spiritual adultery, God also wants to continue to love Israel. God does show his justice by ordaining Israel’s exile. But he also shows his love by the promise of the restoration of Israel.

This is not to say that God’s heart won over his head. This is to say that God’s love worked perfectly with his justice. For the justice of God will still make God punish Israel by sending her into exile. But the love of God will restore Israel from exile. And so we can say therefore that the emotions of God can never be divorced from the justice of God and the will of God.

This brings us to the second element of the love of God.

³ Herbert Vander Lugt, “Love Is Vulnerable,” *Our Daily Bread*, July 2, 2004.

⁴ Duane A. Garrett, *Hosea* (NAC 19A; ed. E. Ray Clendenen; Nashville: Broadman, 1997), 226.

The Interlinked Sovereign Element of God's Love (Hos. 11:9-11)

By interlinked, I mean that God's love is tied together with God's will. By sovereign, I mean the all-knowing, all powerful decisions of God. By intertwined, sovereign element of God's love, I'm talking about the interlocking love of God with the will and knowledge of God.

In v. 8, we saw that the justice of God calls for the punishment of Israel, for Israel's spiritual adultery. But we also saw that the love of God works with the justice of God. Therefore, we can say that the emotions of God cannot be separated from the justice of God and the will of God.

We note two theological axioms about this interlinking sovereign element of God's love.

First, God's Love Operates with God's Will Perfectly. Herein is the first big difference between our love and God's love. Our love dictates our will, our decisions, and our commitments, causing us to keep or not keep our promises most of the time. But God's love operates in perfect agreement with God's will, God's decisions, God's knowledge, God's holiness, and God's justice. John 3:16 says, "*God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.*" The love of God operates in perfect harmony with the will of God to give his only begotten Son. The love of God caused the will of God to give his only Son.

This means that God does not fall in love as we do, but God wills in love. Paul wrote that "*in love, he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will*" (Eph. 1:4-5, ESV). Thus, God does not fall in love, but God places his love on people.⁵

We can then say that the love of God works with the will of God. God therefore loves us, because he chooses to love us. Conversely, nothing outside of himself that he cannot control by himself, or has not foreseen by himself, can ever move him to choose to love or not love, except his own sovereign will to love.⁶ The love of God then is a sovereign love.

And so Yahweh can say in v. 9 (READ). The word, "wrath" (Heb. *ir*), can also mean, "city." Thus, Yahweh is saying that he shall not come in the city. The picture here is the wrath of God that came on the cities of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim. Yahweh will not carry out his wrath against Ephraim, in the same way that he carried out his wrath against Sodom and Gomorrah. Yahweh will not come to Ephraim in full wrath, in the way that he came to Sodom and Gomorrah in full wrath.

The coming wrath through Assyria is yet future. But Ephraim will not suffer total annihilation as Sodom and Gomorrah suffered. That's why Yahweh will not destroy Ephraim "again" (v. 9), even though the coming judgment of Assyria is yet upcoming. This means that the will of God works with the love of God. What God chose to do with Sodom and Gomorrah, he chose not to do with Ephraim.

The reason is found in v. 9 (READ). Yahweh is God, and not man. And Yahweh is the Holy One, in the midst of Israel. This statement recalls the presence of the Holy One in the Tabernacle, in the midst of the camp of Israel (cf. Lev. 11, 19). No unclean thing shall ever enter the presence of the Holy One in the Tabernacle. Thus, it is because God is holy that he will not enter the city of wrath, which in this case, refers to Ephraim.⁷

If God chooses to enter the sinful city of Ephraim, like he did in Sodom and Gomorrah, God will have to destroy Ephraim. It is because God chooses to love Ephraim, that he then chooses not to enter the sinful city of Ephraim. Thus, we see that the love of God works with the holiness of God.

Second, God's Love Originates from God's Perfect Character. "An elderly man lay in a hospital, with his wife of 55 years sitting at his bedside. 'Is that you, Ethel, at my side again?' he whispered.

"'Yes, dear,' she answered.

"He softly said to her, 'Remember years ago when I was in the Veteran's Hospital? You were with me then. You were with me when we lost everything in a fire. And Ethel, when we were poor--you stuck with me then too.' The man sighed and said, 'I tell you, Ethel, you are bad luck!'"

This is the second big difference between our love and God's love. Our love loves because of the loveliness or unloveliness of the loved. You love someone because you like her eyes, her mouth, and her voice, and the way she talks to you. You don't love someone because she's ugly, smells bad breath, and talks a lot about herself.

⁵ Carson, *The Difficult*, 61.

⁶ Carson, *The Difficult*, 60.

⁷ Garrett, *Hosea*, 229.

But God's love loves, not because of the loveliness or unloveliness of the loved, but because of God's perfect will to love the loved. God's love is not dependent on something outside of himself. If God will base his love on your loveliness, he will hate us, because there's nothing lovely in us, for we are unlovely sinners. Our sin is so ugly before God that he cannot love us in our sinfulness. But God loves you based on his own perfect character. God loves perfectly with God's will, God's purposes, God's knowledge, and God's justice.

This sovereign will of God has decreed that he shall not only save Ephraim from his wrath. He shall also restore and regather Israel from exile. (READ vv. 10-11) Hosea is saying here that there shall be a second exodus, a new exodus from the west, from Egypt, and from Assyria. God is the lion who roars and restores Israel. Israel shall no longer be like wandering doves and birds. She shall return to Yahweh, her covenant God.

Conclusion

This sheds light to John's exhortation in 1 John 4:10-11, "*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.*" (ESV)

Remember the two big differences between our love and God's love. Our love dictates our will most of the time. But God's love agrees perfectly with God's will all the time. Also, God's love originates from his perfect character, not from our imperfect unloveliness.

Now John is telling us to love one another, as God has loved us. Do you have an unlovable husband or child? Is he so unlovable—going home at two in the morning, always drinking, always irresponsible, and incompetent in providing for his family, having bad breath, looking dirty most of the day, saying hurtful words, and insensitive to your feelings? You are to love him not because he or she is lovable. You are to love him as God has loved you, with a love that works with the will to love, despite your imperfections.

Do you know of someone you don't like? You are to set your love for her or him not because he or she is lovable, but because God has loved you with within his own character, and not from your own loveliness or unloveliness. You might ask, "Pastor, how can I do that?" The grace of God shall give you the power to do that. "*Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*"