

# DIVINE LOVE AND GRACE

God's Astonishing Love  
*John 3:16–17; Romans 8:35–39*



## LET'S BEGIN HERE

Every Christmas we hear the familiar story—so familiar that we almost move our lips when we hear the words. There's a virgin, a baby, a bewildered husband, a dirty manger, a few shepherds, some traveling magi, and that's all there is to it. Right?

Wrong!

Christmas represents the most magnificent message that's ever been told, which so far exceeds the details we have memorized. Unfortunately, most people don't pause to think about the significance of the message.

Yes, a baby boy was born to a virgin in a dirty stable, but this baby boy was not just any baby. He is God in the flesh—Immanuel, God with us. This message will explore the *reason* for Christ's coming: *God's astonishing love*.



## LET'S DIG DEEPER

### 1. The Origin of God's Astonishing Love (John 3:16; 1 John 4:8–9, 16)

Let's cut to the chase. The reason for the Christmas story and the mysterious baby born in the manger comes down to three words: *God's astonishing love*. To drive home the importance of believing these words, we must reexamine one of the most familiar verses in the whole Bible, John 3:16, and connect it to the birth of Messiah.

Before God *gave* His only Son to be born on Christmas day, He *loved*. “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Because love is an essential part of His character, God's love is unconditional. Love is just as much a part of God's being as holiness, truth, justice, eternity, goodness, faithfulness, and all the rest of His attributes. Out of His being, God *loved*, and therefore, He *gave*.



## Quotable

*To you who have  
lost hope, who  
have shame,  
heartbreak, and  
a trail of wrongs:  
God loves you.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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### 2. The Extent of God's Astonishing Love (Romans 8:35–39)

Many people, even some Christians, have a twisted view of God, believing that He is a gigantic, angry deity, roaming heaven with a big club, looking for somebody to smash because he or she has stepped out of line. That's not the God Christians serve. His love penetrates to the depths of our sin and encompasses our past and our future. We all have moments when we lose our temper, those times when we are really unlovely. At times we refuse to forgive, hold revenge in our hearts, or worse. God's love covers all of that and so much more.

God's love extends to every person around the world, from those with great notoriety and wealth living in big cities, to the unknown and poor in the middle of nowhere. God's unconditional love for the whole world resulted in the sacrifice of His Son, with whom He shared perfect fellowship and love from eternity past. And nothing will ever cause God to withdraw His love from those who believe in Jesus.



#### A CLOSER LOOK

##### *A God with Two Faces?*

Some have observed that God as He revealed Himself in the Old Testament is One of stern justice and capricious wrath, bordering on the thin edge of madness, while God as He revealed Himself in the New Testament is loving and merciful, a grandfatherly type who smiles a lot but doesn't quite know why. Both extremes distort God's character revealed in Scripture.

This dual vision of God is not only unbiblical (Hebrews 13:8; James 1:17) it reduces God to a god (with a lowercase "g") . . . which is to say it reduces Him to no god at all, because it denies His unchanging nature or reduces Him only to a god of our making. The problem lies not in the reality of God but in the perspective of those who cannot see God's love in the Old Testament and His justice in the New Testament. Many have wrongly concluded that love and justice are mutually exclusive. But justice is not the opposite of love (nor is hate), indifference is. (Even hatred recognizes the existence and worth of another, at least worthy of time and negative attention.) Indifference treats another as a nonperson, as nonexistent; justice treats another as worthy of redemption, as worthy of love. Justice may seem a cruel cut, but the cruelest cut is the cut that never comes—that is indifference. God's love is too great not to cut out our sin with the scalpel of justice. He cannot be indifferent and let us die from the cancer of sin.

We may take God as He really is or reject Him on the same basis, but the one opinion not open to us is to create Him as we'd like Him to be. He is and has always been the God of love and justice in both the Old and New Testaments.



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## LET'S LIVE IT

Many people, Christians or not, live their lives feeling defeated, guilty, and unloved by God. For those of us who know God's love, now is the time to meditate on it and thank God for it. For those who have never known unconditional love, make this Christmas the one in which you truly accept God's astonishing love through Jesus Christ.

**Do you truly believe that God's unconditional love surpasses your deepest pain and your darkest sin? If so, take some time to thank God for His love. If not, what is preventing you from receiving His love this Christmas?**



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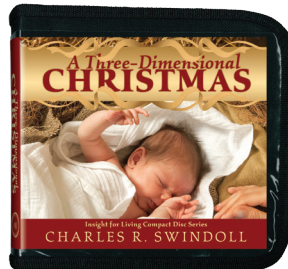
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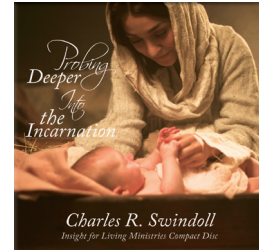
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**Probing Deeper Into the Incarnation**  
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