

## Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

### Pity the Fool(s)

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### John MacArthur

#### Compassion

God's love to all humanity is a love of *compassion*. To say it another way, it is a love of pity. It is a broken-hearted love. He is "good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon [Him]" (Ps. 86:5). "To the Lord our God belong compassion and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against Him" (Dan. 9:9). He is "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth" (Exod. 34:6).

Again, we must understand that there is nothing in any sinner that compels God's love. He does not love us because we are lovable. He is not merciful to us because we in any way deserve His mercy. We are despicable, vile sinners who if we are not saved by the grace of God will be thrown on the trash heap of eternity, which is hell. We have no intrinsic value, no intrinsic worth—there's nothing in us to love.

I recently overheard a radio talk-show psychologist attempting to give a caller an ego-boost: "God loves you for what you are. You *must* see yourself as someone special. After all, you are special to God."

But that misses the point entirely. God *does not* love us "for what we are." He loves us *in spite of what we are*. He does not love us because we are special. Rather, it is only His love and grace that give our lives any significance at all. That may seem like a doleful perspective to those raised in a culture where self-esteem is elevated to the supreme virtue. But it is, after all, precisely what Scripture teaches: "We have sinned like our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have behaved wickedly" (Ps. 106:6). "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away" (Isa. 64:6).

God loves because He is love; love is essential to who He is. Rather than viewing His love as proof of something worthy in us, we ought to be humbled by it.

God's love for the reprobate is not the love of value; it is the love of pity for that which *could* have had value and has none. It is a love of compassion. It is a love of sorrow. It is a love of pathos. It is the same deep sense of compassion and pity we have when we see a scab-ridden derelict lying in the gutter. It is not a love that is incompatible with revulsion, but it is a genuine, well-meant, compassionate, sympathetic love nonetheless.

Frequently the Old Testament prophets describe the tears of God for the lost:

Therefore my heart intones like a harp for Moab, and my inward feelings for Kir-hareseth. So it will come about when Moab presents himself, when he wears himself upon his high place, and comes to his sanctuary to pray, that he will not prevail. This is the word which the Lord spoke earlier concerning Moab (Isa. 16:11–13).

“And I shall make an end of Moab,” declares the Lord, “the one who offers sacrifice on the high place and the one who burns incense to his gods. Therefore My heart wails for Moab like flutes; My heart also wails like flutes for the men of Kir-heres. Therefore they have lost the abundance it produced. For every head is bald and every beard cut short; there are gashes on all the hands and sackcloth on the loins” (Jer. 48:35–37).

Similarly, the New Testament gives us the picture of Christ, weeping over the city of Jerusalem: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling” (Matt. 23:37). Luke 19:41–44 gives an even more detailed picture of Christ's sorrow over the city:

And when He approached, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, “If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you when your enemies will throw up a bank before you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.”

Those are words of doom, yet they're spoken in great sorrow. It is genuine sorrow, borne out of the heart of a divine Savior who “wanted to gather [them] together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings,” but they were “unwilling.”

Those who deny God's love for the reprobate usually suggest that what we see here is the human side of Jesus, not His divinity. They say that if this were an expression of sincere desire from an omnipotent God, He would surely intervene in their behalf and save them. Unfulfilled desire such as

Jesus expresses here is simply incompatible with a sovereign God, they say.

But consider the problems with that view. Is Christ in His humanity more loving or more compassionate than God? Is tenderness perfected in the humanity of Christ, yet somehow lacking in His deity? When Christ speaks of gathering the people of Jerusalem as a hen gathers her chicks, is this not deity speaking, rather than humanity? Do not these pronouncements of doom necessarily proceed from His deity as well? And if the words are the words of deity, how can anyone assert that the accompanying sorrow is the product of Christ's human nature only, and not the divine? Do not our hearts tell us that if God is love—if His tender mercies are over all His works—then what we hear in Jesus' words must be an echo of the divine?

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