The Love Of God And The Depravity Of Man

A Look At How 1John 4:19 Relates To The Sovereignty Of God In Salvation

"We love Him, because He first loved us." – 1John 4:19

Notice: this profound text is a clear statement about the sovereign power of God's love. It is a lesson about the sovereignty of God's saving purpose. It is a celebration of the glory of sovereign love.

The verse, despite its brevity, also turns out to be incredibly rich with meaning. OUR FALLEN STATE – In other words, it underscores for us how bad our sin is, and how deeply infected we are with sinful tendencies.

Think with me for a moment about the implications of that phrase at the end: "He first loved us." In other words, there was a time when we didn't love Him. That is the very essence of depravity, isn't it?—a failure to love God as we ought. Nothing is more utterly and totally depraved than a heart devoid of love for God. Romans 8:7 says, "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God."

That describes a hopeless state of utter inability to love God, to obey His commands, or to please Him. That is the state of all whose hearts have not been renewed by Christ. This is a particularly poignant expression coming from the apostle John—who in his gospel refers to himself repeatedly as "that disciple whom Jesus loved." Notice: in John's own mind, Jesus' love for him completely defined who he was. Why was this such a prominent feature in John's thinking? I think he gives us a clue right here in our verse. The reason he was so preoccupied with the love of Christ for him is that he knew that love was utterly undeserved. He was keenly aware of his own sinfulness. As amazed as John was with the love of Christ for him, he must have been equally amazed at the thought that his own heart had once been devoid of any love for One who was so lovely. How can the human heart be so cold to One who is so worthy of our love? Anyone who truly appreciates the glory of Christ's love, as John did, will be appalled and horrified at the realization that our own hearts do not love Him as we ought to. The knowledge of how perfectly He loves us produces such a sense of utter unworthiness, doesn't it?

You can see this vividly, even at the end of John's life, when he sees a vision of the risen Christ in Revelation 1, and he writes in Revelation 1:17, "And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead." He was literally frightened into a coma, because this vision of the glorified Christ smote him with such an overpowering sense of his own sinfulness. And in an almost involuntary response, he collapsed on his face in a dead swoon out of fear. And there he

lay until Jesus “laid His right hand upon [him,] saying . . . Fear not.”

That same overpowering consciousness of sin and shame is implied in the words of our verse, “We love Him, because He first loved us.” We are so utterly and totally depraved that if God Himself did not love us with a redeeming love, we would never have loved Him at all. If that does not fill you with a consciousness of your own sin—if it doesn’t shock you with a stark realization of the impenetrable hardness of the fallen human heart—then you need to meditate on it a little longer.

I hope you can see how this verse clearly and forcefully underscores the very essence of human depravity. There is nothing more desperately wicked than a heart that fails to love God. There is nothing more blind and irrational and sinful than not loving Someone so worthy of our love. We should need no motive to love Him other than the sheer glory His perfect being. And yet, we would not love Him at all if He had not first loved us! — *Peter Noway*