



*Greg Albrecht*

# God's Beloved Children

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# God's Beloved Children

Greg Albrecht

**What marvelous love the Father has extended to us! Just look at it—we're called children of God! That's who we really are. —1 John 3:1 (MSG)**

**W**e are his children, his cherished treasures and his pearls of great price. In this world filled with shattered dreams, populated with the broken hearted and abandoned, these superlatives sound like a hopelessly naïve exaggeration, but *God is our own true love. We are his precious, priceless and beloved children.* Our own true love loves us with an everlasting, no-matter-what love. We are loved and accepted and embraced by God. Quite naturally, we want to please God. We want, as the cliché mothers often use as they encourage their children, to “make something of ourselves.”

Of course, children really want

relationship with our Heavenly Father.

The desire to please one's parents, the desire to be loved is one thing ... but when we assume that our positive behavior can influence God in such a way to cause him to love us more than he already does, we are in pursuit of God on another path other than the Jesus Way. For how indeed can our actions cause him to increase the *true love* he already has for us?

## PLEASING OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

One of my favorite stories about how children want to please their parents is about a six-year-old boy who was so pleased with what he had accomplished, and he could not wait to tell his father.

As the story goes, the boy's father was working for a company who assigned him, along with several other

employees, to work 500 miles from home on a temporary assignment. The assignment was temporary—so

the employees didn't need to uproot and relocate their families. It just meant that these employees would need to leave every Sunday afternoon on a chartered plane and return after a week's work on Friday evening.

The setting for the story is back in the 1950s and 1960s—in small town America—where invariably the bread winner was a man and the wife and mother stayed at home raising the children. This routine of being away all week, the company promised, would only last six to eight weeks, and then all the employees could return home working at their home office—back to the healthier family routine of leaving their homes every morning, commuting to the local office and then returning to their homes and families every evening.

The man in this story was the father of two young sons—a four-year-old and a six-year-old. He talked over this temporary work assignment with his wife. They knew his absence from the home during the week would be hard on their two sons, but they agreed, as husband and wife and father and mother, to do their best to make this temporary arrangement work.

After their father was gone for two weeks the boys became afraid to sleep alone. Their father was not in the house, and they were afraid. To comfort her sons and probably to get a little sleep herself, the mother started to allow the boys to sleep with her.

The next weekend during her husband's two-day visit home,

**“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” – 1 John 3:1**

to please their parents—children think that positive reports about their performance will mean their parents will love them more than they already do. The same belief motivates and informs our suppositions about our



*"So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir." -- Galatians 4:7*

she and her husband were talking about the boys wanting to sleep in her bed with her, and they agreed that their two sons needed to face their fears. The mother and father decided to offer the boys a reward if they returned to sleeping all night in their own beds.

So, it was the next Friday evening the mother and her two sons were at the airport, with dozens of other wives and children, waiting for their husbands and fathers to come home from their week's work on their chartered airplane. This was many years ago at small town airports when friends and family could wait outside of a wire fence, and watch the propeller driven airplane slowly taxi up to the area where it would park.

When the plane arrived, the gate was opened for friends and family, and as each father walked down the movable stairs that had been wheeled up to the door of the aircraft, children and wives ran to meet them, greeting them with hugs and kisses.

Finally, when the six-year-old saw his father get off the plane he could hardly wait to tell his father the good news—he knew his father would be so happy and so proud, because during that week he and his brother conquered their fears of sleeping alone.

So, even though his father was still 20-30 feet away from them the boy yelled out to him, with scores of people able to hear, "Dad—good news! While you were gone this week Mom didn't sleep with anyone!"

As a man named Art Linkletter used to say, "kids say the darndest things."

## CHILDREN OF GOD, FOLLOWERS OF JESUS

As God's children, in deep appreciation for the true love he has for us, we do want to please him. We want God to always love us. We feel that even though we have heard (and want to believe) he already loves us, perhaps we can make him love us more.

As we encounter the struggles of life, we are well served to remember our spiritual identity, by the grace of God. All that we are and everything that is of eternal value about us is a gift of God. We are loved by God. We are accepted by him. We are treasured and cherished by him. Above all, that's who we are. That's how we identify. Children of God. Followers of Jesus.

When we find ourselves enduring pain and grief, when we feel as if we are at the end of our rope, amid an overwhelming personal crisis of health or loss of job, in the middle of our deepest darkness we see light emerging—we feel the *true love* of God motioning to us with outstretched arms. We feel his love, his acceptance and his welcome. ***We are God's beloved children.***

Apart from God we live a life trying to accumulate and gain and earn the love of our family. We are continually trying to achieve, increase and acquire both physically and spiritually—and at the heart of all this working lies our desire for success, acceptance and love of those we want to love and accept us.

But God's *true love* and *amazing grace* means that we don't have, nor can we ever acquire, anything Father God wants that he does not already have. We cannot save enough money in our checking accounts, even over a lifetime of working,

so that we can write him a check to pay him off and reward him for his love.

The economy of our world works on a deposit and withdrawal basis—like a checking account. You cannot write a check unless and until you have deposited sufficient funds. But God’s grace says that you have an unlimited checking account—the deposit of God’s love, mercy and grace has already been made, because of and by Jesus.

You will never run out of God’s love. God will never return a check you have written because you have insufficient funds. Apart from God, our checking account is empty. We have no religious deposits because of our own work that the bank of heaven recognizes.

But in and through Jesus Christ, by the lavish riches of the grace of God, the bank of heaven overflows with the love, mercy and grace of God and we will forever have all the funds we ever need.

Who are we? We are the loved and cherished children, and by the grace of God, followers of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who is God? God is our own true love, and we are his beloved children.

## PORTRAITS & POTTERY

Day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16) God is painting an ongoing portrait of us, we are his workmanship and handiwork (Ephesians 2:10). As we spiritually grow and mature in Christ, we are becoming God’s *piece de resistance* (French for “the best, and most important

and most exciting” aspect of a person or experience).


Changing the metaphor slightly, as we are on the potter’s wheel (Jeremiah 18:1-4; Romans 9:21; Isaiah 45:9, 64:8) and as the Master Potter forms and fashions it is difficult for us, the clay, to fully appreciate what he sees and to visualize the final product he will produce in and through us by his amazing grace and profound love.

One day when God completes your portrait—when you become what the Master Potter creates—you will have the eyes to see how true God’s love is. Then you will realize all the situations and difficulties and challenges and failures of your life were the raw materials he used to create you as his final product, his masterpiece, his beloved children.

One day, we will see that our flaws and failures do not cause him to stop loving us, for he can never stop loving us. ***He loves us because of who he is, not because of what we do or fail to do.***

- We are not the sum of the mistakes we’ve made.
- We are not the sordid and embarrassing moments that we hope no one ever finds out about.
- We are who God says we are—his children, followers of Jesus, the apple of Father God’s eye.
- God loves us not because of what we have accomplished and acquired—God loves us despite all that we have done. □

*Greg Albrecht is President and Editor-in-Chief of CWR/PTM.*



Yet you, Lord,  
are our Father.  
We are the clay,  
you are the potter;  
we are all the work  
of your hand.

—Isaiah 64:8

# “R-E-S-P-E-C-T... Find Out What It Means to Me!”

Laura Urista

As a singer and musician, I often think in terms of lyrics. My husband often likes to joke that most of our conversations include lyrics from my favorite songs. You may recall the 60s hit song made famous by Aretha Franklin “RESPECT,” from which I took the title of this article. In her song, we never really find out exactly what respect means to her, only that she needs “just a little bit, just a little bit.”

You may also recall these lyrics from another favorite song of the 60s: “What the world needs now is love, sweet love.” Please keep both of those lyrics in mind as we take a close look at Jesus’ words in John 13:34-35, from the Voice translation.

John 13:34-35 (The Voice):  
*“I give you a new command: Love each other deeply and fully. Remember the ways that I have loved you, and demonstrate your love for others in those same ways. Everyone will know you as My followers if you demonstrate your love to others.”*

## A NEW COMMAND

On the night before his beating, crucifixion and death, the disciples’ Master and Lord humbled himself like a common servant and washed their feet. And, like anyone who knows they are nearing the end of their days, Jesus gave his disciples some instructions about what he wanted them to do going

forward. He wanted to help comfort and prepare them for a new way of life following his death. Jesus gave his disciples (and all future Christ-followers by extension) a new command.

He gave us all a new command—a mandate. I especially like *the Voice* translation of this verse because it emphasizes loving others “**deeply and fully.**” Many versions say “*if you love one another*” but we understand that this love command of Christ goes far beyond simply loving our family, friends or other Christians in a superficial or obligatory way. “**Love each other deeply and fully.**”

Jesus is talking about loving our neighbors as ourselves, which we know from his parable of the

good Samaritan means showing love toward everyone. Even the people who don’t look like us, talk like us, think like us. Yes, even our enemies.

The Greek word used for “love” here is *agapao* (verb tense of the noun *agape*). It refers to the supernatural love of God, but that’s only part of the meaning. It also refers to the *love which arises from a keen sense of the value and worth* of the object of our love. When Jesus commanded his disciples (then and for all time) to love (*agapao*) one another, an intrinsic part of his command is to deeply appreciate the worth and value in others as BELOVED children of God, i.e., family.

## R-E-S-P-E-C-T

To deeply appreciate the worth



and value in others means to recognize their place as a child of God, and to respect them as our equal. It can be challenging to recognize the value and worth in others. Especially if we've been taught from a young age that we are somehow more special to God or more worthy, or "called" or "chosen." Of course, that's what Jews (the audience Jesus was speaking to in this passage) were brought up learning from the day they were born.

Sometimes it is even hard to see the value and worth in ourselves! Part of the problem is that we don't really believe, deep inside, that God loves or values us

brother, or maybe at least our first cousin! In other words, we see them as a part of our tribe.

That means intentionally giving space for others to have the same opportunities and rights we enjoy. It means intentionally giving others space to have a different point of view about things and a chance to express their point of view. Yes, even if they look different from us, or speak differently, or have a different belief system, or have a different education or a different cultural background than us. Maybe **especially** because they are different from us, we need to give others that space.



and others. Or maybe we do believe God loves us, but we've been taught all our lives that we must keep doing good works to earn and keep God's love.

In the John 13:34, Jesus said *"Remember the ways I have loved you and demonstrate your love for others in those same ways."* When he said this to the disciples, he had just humbled himself to serve them by washing their feet. This must have been part of what Christ had in mind when he said the disciples should demonstrate that same type of love to others.

When we recognize and accept the true value of others, looking at them through the eyes of Jesus with his *agape* love, we will absolutely RESPECT them as a fellow child of God—a sister or

### SAY WHAT? LOVE YOUR ENEMIES?!

What was Jesus thinking when he commanded us to even have *agape* love for our enemies? That kind of respect and love doesn't come naturally to us humans. But we can make a choice to try to consistently choose to recognize, value and respect others. We can make it a daily habit to **ask** Jesus to live in us and love through us. Godly *agape* love flows through the Holy Spirit as we surrender to Jesus and allow him to live in us and love through us.

That's what the world needs now and that's what R-E-S-P-E-C-T means to me. □

*Laura Urista is the Managing Editor for CWRm and PTM.*

### Biblical References to Jesus' Cross as a 'Sacrifice' (NRSV)

Mark 10:45 "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many."

John 1:29 "The next day [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'"

Romans 3:23-25 "...since all have sinned and fall short the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith."

1 Corinthians 5:7 "Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed."

Ephesians 5:1-2 "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

Hebrews 10:10 "And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

# “Sacrifice” two perspectives

Brad Jersak

Christianity and its scriptures unabashedly use the language of *sacrifice* to describe both the life and death of Jesus Christ. The biblical references in the sidebar (page 6) demonstrate a variety of Old Testament offerings fulfilled in the saving death of Israel’s promised Messiah—from the Passover Lamb to the Day of Atonement.

The downside of this move is how the word *sacrifice* has religious connotations that run counter to the gospel and, when applied to the Cross, distort its meaning. When Christians weave pagan sacrificial systems into atonement theories, the tragic result is a misrepresentation of who God is, what God wants, the meaning of Jesus’ death and of salvation itself. For this reason, it’s important to distinguish between two opposing conceptions of sacrifice.

## “SACRIFICE” AS AN APPEASEMENT TRANSACTION

When I refer to ‘pagan sacrificial systems,’ I’m talking about the rituals of so many religions that sought to (a) appease their gods’ anger or (b) earn their god’s favor. The people would bring an offering to their priest, who would sacrifice it on an altar to their god, hoping to manipulate outcomes in their favor.

Popular examples of the former (appeasement) was the practice of sacrificing children or virgins to the gods of wrath. Jeremiah condemns the practice of sacrificing one’s firstborn as burnt offerings to Molech (see Jeremiah 7:31, 19:5, 32:35). Or take for example the sacrifices of human hearts and blood in Aztec religion. Or the ‘propitiation’ of rumbling volcano gods by tossing virgins into the lava.

Now imagine my horror when, as a seminary student, certain professors claimed this is precisely how the New Testament imagines the ‘atoning death of Jesus.’ To assuage the wrath of God against humankind, Jesus offered himself to bear the full weight of God’s fury against sin on himself. Salvation was accomplished and applied as we believed that Jesus’ death extinguished the flames of God’s anger. As N.T. Wright writes in his book, *The Day the Revolution Began*, wrath appeasement paganizes the gospel.

In the latter case (earning God’s favor), sacrifices are

transactional. God takes pleasure in those who have earned his blessings. The quality or quantity of the offering determines whether or how worthy one is of the gifts and grace of God.

But can you see the oxymoron there? Earning grace? Paying for a gift? And yet, isn’t that exactly the way of Christless religion? Salvation becomes a business contract to be negotiated. What a bargain!

## “Sacrifice” - definitions

1. The rite or rituals of offering something precious to a deity.
2. A costly act for the sake of an ideal, an end, or a person.
3. Advancing another runner in baseball at the cost of going out oneself.

## “SACRIFICE” AS SELF-OFFERING LOVE

Given such Christless concepts of sacrifice (and how they creep into the gospel), it would be tempting to ditch that language altogether. But apostolic preaching brings another perspective to the table. It sets up the contrast between pagan sacrifices and the gospel, where the sacrifice speaks of ‘costly love’ for the sake of the other.

Sacrificial love is not foreign to human experience. We see it whenever a woman endures labor to give birth to a child or cares for a newborn despite the pain and exhaustion. We see it whenever a firefighter rushes into a burning building or a forest inferno to rescue strangers and their property. That’s not appeasement and that’s not a transaction. It is a costly self-offering to save someone else.

This is the sense of ‘sacrifice’ in the Jesus gospel—God loved the world in this way: he sent his Son as pure gift to rescue and redeem his children from perishing and to gift them with eternal life. □

*Bradley Jersak serves as Pastoral Scholar for PTM and as an editor for our publications.*

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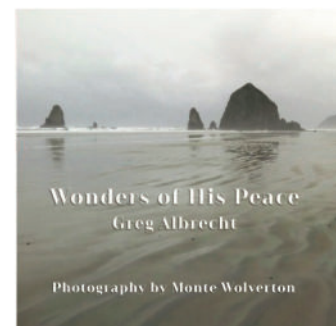
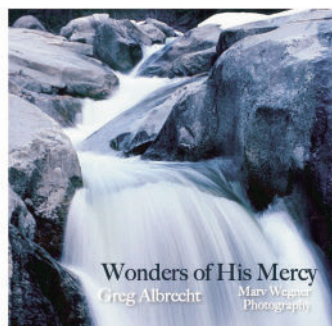
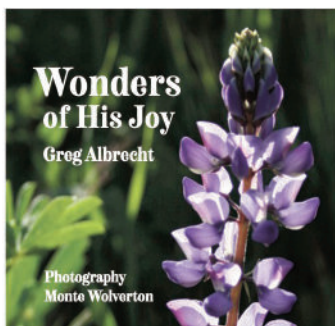
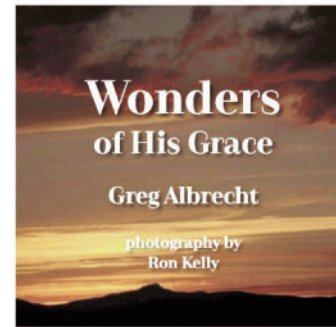
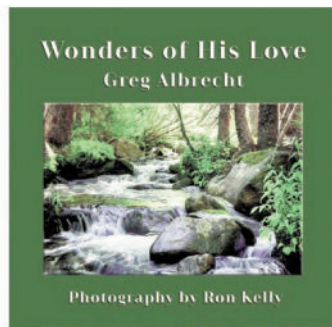
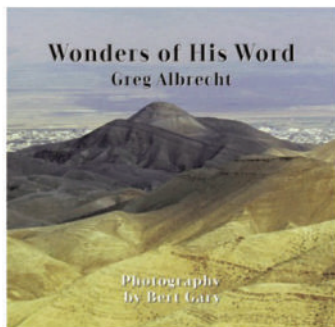
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