

BOOK REVIEW: "THE LOVE THAT IS GOD" BY FREDERICK CHRISTIAN
BAUERSCHMIDT

One of the loveliest aspects of God's character is His unselfish love. God's love for His children is unconditional and unaffected by anything about them, including their actions or emotions. Selflessness, tolerance, and forgiveness characterize this steadfast love. After experiencing God's love, one's life is entirely transformed and filled with hope, joy, and serenity. Therefore, we should always have hope since God's love for us never wavers or changes.

Book Information

“The Love That Is God” by Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt dives deeply into the Christian concept of God as love. Bauerschmidt examines Christians’ understanding and experiences of divine love using the writings of influential authors like St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas and modern theologians. Bauerschmidt draws inspiration from writers like Thomas Aquinas, Geoffrey Chaucer, Dorothy Day, and Julian of Norwich as he develops his idea of a rebirth of community love that resonates with people of all religious affiliations.

Summary

The book “The Love That Is God” describes the different aspects of divine love as expressed in Christian teachings. Bauerschmidt divides the book into five parts, ‘God is love’,

‘The love that is God is crucified love’, ‘Friendship with the risen Jesus Christ’, ‘We cannot love God if we do not love each other’, and ‘We live our love out of community created by the spirit’.

The following are the main points from the five parts based on God's divine love.

Divine love as an expression of God's nature

Many Christians hold that God is love and that God's character is primarily characterized by love. According to Bauerschmidt, one of God's defining qualities is Divine love¹. This view holds that God's love for people is a fundamental aspect of God's being rather than something that God chooses to do or determines to do. This love is inseparable and part of the very nature of God. The love between the Trinity is the perfect love - mutual, interpersonal and overflowing. The Father loves the Son, and the Son is returning the love to the Father, and from this mutuality of love the Holy Spirit is breathed out². Furthermore, out of this eternal exchange, our creation comes forth. As our existence is staked on God's love, we grow weak when we pursue independence from Him. How we experience God's love also depends on the degree to which we have aligned ourselves with those most protected, defended, and claimed by Him.

Christ's crucified love

God's response to sin and human flaws is divine love. This understanding is based on scriptural passages such as John 1: 14, which states that "The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."³ Jesus is the true revelation of the love of the Father. He is the divine love running towards us to embrace us even though we have wasted our gifts. His life ushers in the Kingdom

¹ Bauerschmidt, Frederick Christian, *The Love That Is God: An Invitation to Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2020).

² Bauerschmidt, p. 27.

³ Bauerschmidt, p.32.

of heaven which is contrary to this world and could not be allowed by it. Seen this way, Christ's death is inevitable. The love of Jesus who prays for His accusers while His life is taken away on the cross becomes the fire of His sacrifice. It is a love that aims to make peace between God and us even though we are far from perfect. This has enormous implications for how Christians understand God. The book teaches that God's love for humans is undeserved, and even though we cannot truly reciprocate it back to God, we could return it by loving our neighbor.

Divine love is an invitation to participate in the life of God

In the Christian tradition, divine love is also understood as an invitation for humanity to participate in the life of God. This portrayal of God's love suggests that He is eager to build a loving relationship with people. God is approachable through the grace He bestows us and He leads us into a divine friendship by His Spirit. It is vital to consider what this entails for Christians in terms of fellowship, prayer, and love for all people. It has significant effects on Christians' feeling of mission. While we are encouraged to share God's love with the world and represent God's love, we are also reminded that God is the One that transforms us and creates our own goodness.⁴ Christians believe that divine love is an invitation to participate in God's life; therefore, they are urged to care for the poor and needy and to display God's love to the world.

Love one another as I have loved you

The deep appreciation of God's love is meant to propel us into action. Once we understand how much we've been loved by God when we knew Him not, we should be willing to reflect the same love to our neighbors even when they deserve it not. Jesus makes this a commandment and John further warns that if we don't love, we abide in death (3:14). Bauerschmidt explains the exchange of divine love between people as something that delights God. We have freely received it and should freely give it. The same principle applies for

⁴ Bauerschmidt, p.74.

forgiveness – we have been forgiven so we must forgive. God's love for people is an active force with practical repercussions rather than a lofty ideal. God is concerned about the human relationships and those most vulnerable to injustice – the poor, orphans, widows, and immigrants. We are supposed to work for social justice (as defined in His word) and be a source of good.

The Church as the community called together by the Spirit

According to Bauerschmidt, 'The church is not first and foremost an institution (though it is that) or even a tradition of belief and practice (though it is that as well) but a life: a shared life of transforming enemies into friends, a life of crucified love, the life of the Holy Spirit blowing through creation'⁵. It is a community created by the Spirit with people from all walks of life. As we are coming to Christ, growing in faith and love, we transform into the body of Christ. The church transcends the boundaries of nations, races and genders. Such community of divine friendship is a sign of the Kingdom of God. We need to be reminded of the coming Kingdom as much as those who don't believe in it. By keeping our eyes on God's promise, we can forge forward and care for those in need.

Praise

I love the book's theme, "God's Divine love." The book's central theme is the idea that divine love is the wellspring of everything good in the world and the bedrock of the Christian faith. The author, however, goes deeper than the standard analysis of God's love which we often equate to the human love of a parent. As the love of God is much more than what we could imagine, we need a revelation from the Holy Spirit to even begin to understand it. Bauerschmidt does exactly that by using his personal revelations and going back to the writings of St. Augustine, Catherine of Siena, bishop Ignatius of Antioch, Julian of Norwich, Martin Luther

⁵ Bauerschmidt, p.87

King Jr., and others, to draw from their insight. The glimpses of the divine love are touching and transformative as they are perceived by the struggling humans. God's love is unchanged by our grief, struggles, tears, and doubt. It could spark a change in us at the most unexpected moment. It draws us toward God in prayer. Prayer expands our hearts and conform our will to God⁶.

The author contemplates on what it means to love your enemies and still hate them with a perfect hatred. Both actions are favored in the Bible but seem contrary to each other. His analysis concludes that we should hope that our enemies are destroyed not by physical death but by becoming our friends through the transforming work of God's mercy⁷. 'To love our enemies is, in the end, to disarm ourselves of any weapons except the cross and the Spirit's gifts of faith, hope, and love'⁸. The author also reminds us that God is the true creator of goodness in us and through us. As we go with our lives, we will encounter struggle as we are still on a pilgrimage. Attaching our hearts to material gains could easily bring us hurt and disappointment, whereas prayer and fellowship with other Christians would help us grow in our friendship with God.

Mercy and forgiveness are two of the ways God's love is shown. According to Bauerschmidt, Christians should be inspired by God's love to forgive people no matter how challenging or dire the circumstances. This is drawn from Luke 6:37, which states, "Forgive, and you will be forgiven."⁹ It calls on followers of Christ to make an effort to build positive relationships with people and bring about constructive change in the world. We must act with the confidence that God's love can mend relationships ruined by sin and conflict in all we do.

⁶ Bauerschmidt, 49.

⁷ Bauerschmidt, p. 70.

⁸ Bauerschmidt, p. 72.

⁹ Bauerschmidt, p. 68.

Critique

Even though it is engaging and thought provoking, the analysis in the book leaves many loose ends and skips important topics. For example, there is little mention of the spiritual war we are involved in. The emphasis on love is clear but more practical instructions on how to navigate between ‘hating the sin’ and ‘loving your enemies’ would have been useful.

The author was aware how much more could be added but chose to leave it for self-reflection by the reader. Still, I was captivated by the first chapters of the book. The topic of the church in chapter 5 understandably evoked more conflicting feelings in me due to its turbulent history which the author didn’t acknowledge nor attempted to address. Bauerschmidt advocates for religious life, but he overlooks that for many people today religion means the same thing it meant in ancient Rome – a participation in rituals devoid of active faith. How could more ritual be the answer to the youth that needs manifestations of God’s power? When Jesus warned the churches in Revelation for their sins, He certainly didn’t compel them to practice more rituals. We have been given the baptism and the Eucharist, but they should not be our only acts of faith.

I wish the author had addressed the problem of churches that have become lukewarm and/or lost their first love. Even though Bauerschmidt often used the term ‘radical’ to describe to work of the Spirit, Chapter 5 feels like a defense of the status-quo. The author objectively noted that Christians have tolerated inequality and even engaged in violence over the last 2000 years. Similar notice of the deeds of religious institutions would have been fitting and fair. Maybe the author simply didn’t want to distract the reader with messages of division that would take away the focus from what ultimately unites us and matters the most – the love of God.

Recommendations

The book has left me wanting to learn more about God and His word which I think is the best testimony of how well it is written. From its divinely inspired content, humbling revelations and loving and painstaking arguments, the book is a heartwarming and faith-instilling witness for God's love. At times it may feel like it cuts short the discussions it had just stirred, but it still delivers a poignant message about the divine Trinity. The book is Bauerschmidt's true act of love, as he understood it, by sharing his knowledge of God's nature with us, his readers.

Bibliography

Bauerschmidt, Frederick Christian, *The Love That Is God: An Invitation to Christian Faith*

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