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*The love of God is broad like beech and meadow,  
wide as the wind, and an eternal home.  
God leaves us free to seek him or reject him,  
he gives us room to answer 'Yes' or 'No'*

Fred Kaan

*There are three things which make up the essence of  
God's love - loving others than oneself, wishing to be  
one with them, and devoting oneself to their  
happiness.*

*It should be known that God is constantly present,  
continually striving and acting on a person, and  
touching his free will but never forcing it. For if God  
were to force a person's free will, his dwelling in God  
would be destroyed, and he would be left only with  
God's dwelling in him.*

Emanuel Swedenborg in 'True Christian Religion'

# God Loves You



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## God loves you

“Smile, God loves you” is an easy thing to say but if God loves us why does he allow us to suffer? How can we reconcile a God of Love with our everyday experience of the world in which we live?

To try and get some idea of how God loves us we could start by thinking about parents and their children. It is a very human thing for parents to try to love their children equally whatever their different characters and abilities and to seek the best for them as individuals whatever happens. Now parenthood is tough and however idealistically parents approach the bringing up of their children it is often the case that one child will think that mother or father loves their sister or brother more than them. And yet that is not what the parents really want or strive to achieve. And if children grow up and go in very different directions to those envisaged by their parents, truly loving parents will continue to love their children just the same.

Now God loves his children, you, me and everyone else, not with the imperfect love which we express in our lives, that has limits and conditions, but with an unconditional love that has no limits and no boundaries and is shared equally with all. And it is the nature of God's love that it is given with the freedom for us to accept it, reject it or misuse it – there are no conditions in which God's love is not given – it is unconditional.

In our human relationships we know how wonderful it is if our love for someone else is freely returned – not because they have to love us but because they want to love us. Paradoxically the more freedom we give to those whom we love the greater and stronger is the love that is returned. Force someone to love you and no real mutual love develops. Now offering to love someone and leaving them the freedom to respond or not is a high risk and potentially painful strategy – as most people find out at some stage in their lives when love is not returned.

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And this in a very human and finite way is an image and likeness of how God loves us. He offers us love and gives us the freedom to say yes or no. God knows that if we return his love then a deep relationship can develop but if we are unable to respond to his love then he feels pain for what might have been.

One of the hardest things a parent has to do is to let their child make mistakes – despite realising the probable pain and suffering that will ensue. Children have to grow and develop and make their own way in the world and not feel they are being manipulated or directed by their parents. They will make the right decisions and the wrong decisions and yet the loving parent has to stand back and not intervene. They just offer advice to their child as to what they should do and then leave their child the freedom to make up their own mind.

And this is how God's love works with us. God wants us to be happy and to be fulfilled. He wants us to respond to his love in freedom and he shows us how we should live. But because God values our freedom above all else he cannot intervene when he sees things going wrong. If he intervened in the greatest disasters that beset mankind surely he would also have to intervene in even the smallest personal problems in life and then where would we be – we would be like puppets being controlled by God in the play of life.

Bad things happen. God does not want them to happen. But God cannot intervene because of the freedom he gives us to choose to respond or not to his unconditional love. This is the nature of the God who loves you. God loves everyone equally but what we receive of his love depends on our openness to his love and our acknowledgement that all love comes from God. If we respond to his love we can feel loved, free and forgiven and we will then want to share God's love with those around us.

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