

Living in the overflow of God's love Love... always protects

(Scripture reading- Gen 3:1-3)

We all know how common it is for love to not last. It seems that these days when we hear about a love that lasts for years and years we seem to respond in amazement because of how rare it is. It seems for so many of us that love goes from exciting, to exhausting to expiring. It could be that the longer you know someone the more you become exposed to all the facets of how unlovable they can be. Look at Helen and me for instance...

Charlie Brown- Charlie asks Linus one day, "have you ever had a stress test?" Linus looks over at his sister, Lucy... and says... no, but I live with one!

We can relate because we have lived (at least from time to time) with the stress of other people. People are remarkably unlovable at times.

We have been looking at what it means to live in the overflow of God's love. What we're seeing is that God has a love for us that keeps on going (like the Ever-Ready Rabbit). This morning I want to give you an illustration of the love that keeps going and going and going.

You remember the story of the time that Adam and Eve needed no clothes. A time when there was nothing to be ashamed of. But all of this changed after they sinned. When they sinned, they couldn't get dressed fast enough. All they could do was sew fig leaves together to cover themselves up.

After Adam and Eve sinned they longed for protection. They knew the consequences for their conduct. God clearly had warned them: **"you must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die."** **Genesis 3:3, NIV.**

Surprise, surprise, the very tree they were told not to even touch was the one they couldn't resist. And once they opened this door they opened themselves up to unwanted consequences. One of these consequences was shame. Before this time, they had no shame. But now they felt nothing but shame. Just like us, they hide and tried to cover themselves. But the fig leaves were insufficient coverings. The fig leaves and trees are no protection from the eyes of God. It's a horrible, vulnerable place to be isn't it? Vulnerable and wounded because of sin and because you know God knows.

The warning is clear-- **don't even touch, or death!** And here's what we know about God; he is a righteous God. Some might even say that God means what he says, and says what he means!

But what about God's love? Adam and Eve are his children, created in his image. Is it possible that God's mercy can override his justice? Isn't there some way that mercy and justice can live side-by-side.

Genesis 3:21 shares with us an interesting perspective. Gen 3:21 doesn't tell us in words-- but illustrates to us in the action of God. Look again at how God responds to their sin (and to our sin for that matter). **"The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them."** **Genesis 3:21, NIV.**

Act 1

God takes the life of an animal. Innocent blood. This animal certainly did not deserve to be killed. In fact, according to God's warning, Adam and Eve deserved to die but they live. The animal deserves to live; yet it dies.

Act 2

The Creator makes clothes for those created in his image. God becomes a Taylor.

Act 3

God dresses Adam and Eve.

God covers the ones he loves.

1 Corinthians 13:7 Love... always protects.

Hey, hasn't God done the exact thing for you and me? It seems pretty clear that we've eaten the forbidden fruit time and again.

- We've all hidden from the hurtful things we've done to somehow make ourselves feel better.
- Our hands, or feet or eyes have gone places we've been warned to stay away from.
- We have eaten our share of the sweet, damning forbidden fruit!

We can look at the story of Adam and Eve and see the shame they felt as they covered themselves and hid from God because of their shame. And with gut level honesty, what we see in Adam and Eve we see in ourselves--we hide. We cover up (Fig leaves) and then try to act like everything's fine. We work harder to do good works and deeds, but our sin is only skin deep (or leaf-deep). And it takes very little to happen to us before we find ourselves standing naked before God, unable to hide and filled with the shame of our own nakedness.

But the God of Righteousness and the God of Mercy does to you and to me what he did for Adam and Eve.

- He sheds innocent blood! What he offers us is the life of his Son
- From this sacrifice, God offers us a robe. Not an animal skin, but a robe of Righteousness.
- Then look at what he does with that robe-- God dresses us himself with himself.

"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." Gal. 3:26,27, NIV.

"By faith in Christ you are in direct relationship with God. 27Your baptism in Christ was not just washing you up for a fresh start. It also involved dressing you in an adult faith wardrobe--Christ's life, the fulfillment of God's original promise." Gal. 3:26-27 MSG

Look at what's really happening: Whose doing the dressing with Adam and Eve? It looks to me like they did nothing and God did all the work. Adam and Eve did not request the animal skin nor did they dress themselves.

We are in the same situation. Paul says: **"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no-one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Ephesians 2:8-10, NIV.**

We hide, but God seeks. We have a problem with sin-- he brings sacrifice. We try to cover ourselves (even with fig leaves), and he brings the robe of righteousness. We want to sing the song Isaiah sings: "I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels." **Isaiah 61:10, NIV.**

God is love, and love always protects. Can you think of times in your life as you look back in hindsight where God has protected you?

Open floor

Paul tells us in **2 Thess. 3:3** that the Lord "will strengthen and protect you from the evil one."

God protects you, because God loves you. Love always protects!

Do you know anyone who needs your love?

- Have you ever heard anyone gossip about someone you know?
 - Sort of looks like a school of piranha making a meal out of your friend...
 - Let me tell what I heard about her...
 - Not only that but she also did...
 - And then so and so said that she went...
- And now everyone's looking at you... it's your turn to speak.
- What does love says about your friend?

Let's look at Jesus: The woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11). Jesus' critics were not silent about what this woman did... but look at the language of love:

Jesus said nothing negative about this woman...

- Love says nothing!
- Love stays silent.
- Love (**Prov. 10:12** Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs) (**1Pet. 4:8**) "Love covers over a multitude of sins.")
- Love doesn't expose
- Love doesn't gossip
- When love speaks--love speaks words of defense.
- Love speaks words of kindness
- Love speaks words of protection.

Do you know anyone who needs to be protected with the love God loves you with?

In the video to follow, you're going to see a young quadriplegic who, left on his own, would soon die. You're going to see a young man who has little, if anything to offer physically. I want to encourage you to see the father in the video as God and to see the young man as yourself--spiritually.

Show "Together" Video

If you were able to relate to the paraplegic and the father, then you can relate to what it means to live in the overflow of God's love.

Church, there is no one who knows Jesus better than his own followers and no one who knows Jesus better than his own church! We then should be the foremost experts on love in the whole world. We know what it's like to be Rick and to be the spiritual paraplegic who is unconditionally loved! What I'm saying is nobody should know more about love than we do... because nobody should know more about Jesus than we do!

1 Thess. 4:9-10 9Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. 10And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.

Do you know anyone who needs to be protected with the love God loves you with? I'm not only talking about those you love to love-- but about those who are sometimes unlovable. Jesus never viewed a person as disposable. Even on the cross, Jesus' love was a protecting love... **Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing..." Luke 23:34**

Live in the overflow of God's love for the sake of showing others the protecting love of God.