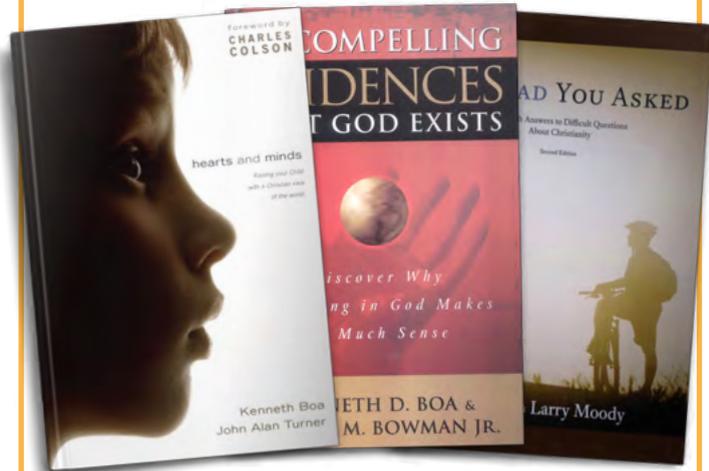


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## THE HEART OF THE MATTER

God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7)



By the time students reach middle or junior high school, the worst of the playground humiliation is over. But for those early school years, nothing strikes fear into the hearts of some children like the teacher's announcement: "Today at recess, we're going to choose teams and play kickball." The less popular and nonathletic students know the drill all too well: They will stand staring at the sky or with their feet in a dwindling crowd while the superstars are selected amidst great backslapping and high-fiving. Then, because their sole qualification is that they are alive, they will be chosen among the last. And woe to the last one chosen—he or she will be assigned a position on the far side of the outfield where the least amount of collateral damage can be caused by errant play.

No one likes to be chosen last for anything. We say we don't mind; we pretend not to care. But inside, we resent being judged—and either accepted or rejected—on the basis of athleticism, appearance, intelligence, or social standing. We want to be appreciated for who we are deep inside. The good news is that God values us in exactly that way. Regardless of how adequate or inadequate we appear to be, God knows our hearts.

The prophet Samuel was directed by God to choose not a team, but a "captain" of a team: the next king of Israel. After reviewing all of Jesse's sons, God's choice was discovered to be tending the sheep—Jesse's youngest son, David. Samuel had been warned by God to remember that God's evaluations are based not on outward appearances but on the heart. In

other words, the way people choose and the way God chooses are not the same.

Though the wounds from elementary and middle school popularity contests usually heal with time, life continues to make us feel inadequate in many ways. Our comfort is in knowing that God sees who we really are on the inside—and values us accordingly. Knowing that He is the only one we really need to please, and that His evaluation is the only one that really counts, is a relief in a world built around outward appearances.

### GOD'S PROMISE:

*He is always aware of exactly who you really are.*

REFLECTIONS MINISTRIES

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REFLECTIONS

Reflections on God's revealed truth

AUGUST 2019

# GOD'S LOVE

surpasses comprehension

God of grace, Your enduring revelation in the written Word and the living Word displays a degree of concern and compassion that is too marvelous for me to fathom. I cannot see why You would take notice of us, let alone send Your Son into the world to redeem us with the blood of His cross. Your love surpasses comprehension, and Your Son reveals the lengths to which You would go to overcome the alienation of sin and welcome us as Your adopted children into Your heavenly household. Even while we were rebellious enemies, Christ died for the ungodly. Such love is too high; I cannot attain to it. It is too deep; I cannot plumb it. It is too wide; I cannot encompass it. Because You have loved us in this way, may we express that love in our love for others.

A teaching letter encouraging believers to develop a clear mind and a warm heart



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## COMMITMENT, PART 2

## THE GOD WHO COMMITS

Douglas J. Rumford makes a profound statement in his book *SoulShaping*. He writes, “We make our commitments, then our commitments make us. Once they are chosen, many other choices follow as a matter of course.”<sup>1</sup> Once we commit to following Jesus, many other decisions in life must fall into line or we overturn our prior commitment.

*Once God committed Himself  
to our highest good,  
His will toward us was sealed.*

But how are we to know that our commitment to God will be honored? All of the commitments we make should flow from the commitment God has first made to us. Once God committed Himself to our highest good, His will toward us was sealed. God tells us that He is committed to all who are in Christ, and that our relationship with Him will last forever. Jeremiah 31:31–36 shows us the covenant of commitment the Lord made with His people:

“The time is coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the

covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord. “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the Lord. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” This is what the Lord says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the Lord Almighty is his name: “Only if these decrees vanish from my sight,” declares the Lord, “will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before me.”

The ultimate basis for security and significance in life relates to commitment (security) and to how long something will last (significance). In these six verses of Jeremiah, God provides for His people a

sense of both security and significance—a sure word that His commitment to them will never fail.

In spite of the rebelliousness of the people of Judah, the Lord assured them through the prophet Jeremiah that He was committed to their ultimate good. Judgment was inevitable because they had flagrantly violated God’s commands, but the prophet looked beyond this impending condemnation to a time of consolation. There will be a faithful remnant, and God’s people will eventually enjoy the blessings of forgiveness and complete renewal.

*God’s grace is always  
previous to our response  
and demonstrates His  
unshakable commitment to us.*

In this covenant, God commits Himself to the welfare of the house of Israel and Judah and predicts a time when they will all be able to know Him and when His law will be written on their hearts. “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11).

God’s grace is always previous to our response and demonstrates His unshakable commitment to us. “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:9–10). When we love God, it is “because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

Lewis Thomas, scientist and philosopher, described humans best when he said, “We are, perhaps, uniquely among earth’s creatures, the worrying animal. We worry away our lives, fearing the future, discontent with the present, unable to take in the idea of dying, unable to sit still.”<sup>2</sup> God’s promise of abiding love and commitment to our well-being enables us to live above worry, above fear. His commitment to us empowers us to follow through on our commitment to Him. As Martin Luther said, “It is not imitation which brings about our sonship of God, but our sonship which makes possible imitation.”<sup>3</sup>

## NEXT MONTH:

*Commitment, Part 3  
Being Committed to God*

COMMUNICATING  
WITH SCRIPTURE

A new minister moved to town and went out one Saturday to visit his parishioners. All went well until he came to one house. It was obvious that someone was home, but no one came to the door, even after the minister knocked several times.

Finally, he took out his card, wrote “Revelation 3:20” on the back, and stuck it in the door. Later that day, the parishioner found the card and looked up the verse, which read, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.”

The next Sunday, when the offering was counted, the minister found his card in the collection plate. Below his message was the added notation, “Genesis 3:10,” which reads, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself”!

<sup>1</sup> Douglas J. Rumford, *SoulShaping: Taking Care of Your Spiritual Life* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1996), 91. <sup>2</sup> Lewis Thomas, *The Medusa and the Snail*, quoted in *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations*, 15th ed., edited by Emily Morison Beck (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), 884. <sup>3</sup> Quoted in Gordon S. Wakefield, *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 209.