



## God Is Love (1 John 4:7-16)

### I. INTRO

- A. There is a natural, logical kind of love that loves lovely things and lovely people. That's a logical kind of love.
- B. But there is another kind of love that doesn't look for value in what it loves, but, in fact, creates value in what it loves.
- C. When one of our daughters was two or three years old she was given a small pink *bunny blanket*, which quickly became her inseparable companion.
  - 1. On one corner was an embroidered bunny face complete with cute little whiskers, and it was trimmed with satin that she loved to rub between her fingers.
  - 2. She had other belongings that were much more valuable, but none that she loved more than her *bunny blanky*.
  - 3. As you can imagine, it didn't take long for the *bunny blanky* to become torn and stained from who knows what.
  - 4. I can remember attempting to pry it out of her clenched little fingers while she was taking a nap so that we could quickly wash it, only to have her wake-up and cry until the *bunny blanky* was returned to her anxious grasp.
  - 5. After a few months the *bunny blanky* became more and more shabby and looked less and less like a bunny. The most sensible thing to do would be to trash the tattered little germ-magnet. But that was absolutely unthinkable because she loved her *bunny blanky*.
- D. Today we want to consider that, while it doesn't make much sense, God loves stained and tattered sinners, and we can't separate God from them/us any more than we could have separated my daughter from her *bunny blanky*.
- E. I will read our passage for today, pray, engage in a bit of review to help set some context, we'll see what John has to say about God being love, about God creating love in His people, and then we will conclude our service by celebrating communion together: *"Beloved, let us love one another, for*

*love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> The one who does not love does not know God, for **God is love.** <sup>9</sup> By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. <sup>10</sup> In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. <sup>11</sup> Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup> No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. <sup>13</sup> By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. <sup>14</sup> We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. <sup>15</sup> Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. <sup>16</sup> We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. **God is love,** and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.” --1 John 4:7-16*

F. Before we unpack the passage let's build some context:

1. John was the sole remaining apostolic survivor who had an intimate, eyewitness relationship with Jesus throughout His earthly ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven.
2. John met Jesus, probably in his late teens -- or early twenties. He and his brother James were known as the "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17) in their pre-Christ follower days. Now Grandpa Pastor John is in his late 80's or early 90's and he's been called the "apostle of love" for quite some time.
3. John's letters are circular in style – winding their way, like a drill bit, to some essential core Christian beliefs. He's the most mystical of the NT writers, and he makes repeated use of repetition ☺.
4. Last week we considered the gift of the Holy Spirit from 1 John 4:1-6. The essence of the gift of the Holy Spirit is that the Holy Spirit will do IN us and THROUGH us what we cannot do on our own. The Holy Spirit is God's empowering presence...
  - a. In 1994 a well-regarded Pentecostal theologian named Gordon Fee<sup>1</sup> wrote nearly a 1,000-page book that remains the most comprehensive treatment available of Paul's teaching on the

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<sup>1</sup> Fee also wrote the most read book on how to study the Bible: *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, first published in 1981.

Holy Spirit.

- b. One of the essential aspects of Paul’s writings that Gordon Fee emphasizes is that the Holy Spirit must be experienced as a living and vital presence within the believer’s life AND in the Church.
  - c. The reason Gordon Fee titled the book *God’s Empowering Presence* is that those words were a summation of all that he had learned in writing the book: The Holy Spirit is God’s empowering presence.
  - d. Last weekend we closed the services by praying for all who desired a fresh experience, a fresh filling, of the Holy Spirit. (Let’s keep praying for that.)
5. John finishes his active teaching in 1 John at the end of v. 6 in this chapter. So, beginning here in v. 7 the rest of his letter is a reemphasis of what he has already been saying. Pastor and commentator D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones refers to the rest of the letter as: practical exhortations.<sup>2</sup>

## II. BODY

- A. Our text for today is one of the greatest and most thorough texts in the entire Bible regarding what love is. It tells us:
1. That God is love (twice – vs. 8 & 16) [bookends] *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”* --Romans 5:8
  2. That God has shown us His love through sending Jesus to pay for our sins. [one of the meanings of the word *“justification”* is to reconcile accounts.]
  3. That God gives us His love to share with one another.
  4. That true love is not possible apart from God, but only through the Holy Spirit can we love others as Jesus has loved us. [Natural, human love looks for value in what it loves, but, God’s love – IN us and THROUGH us creates value in what it loves.]
- B. What’s the BIG IDEA for today? God’s love creates value in what it loves and

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<sup>2</sup> Lloyd-Jones. *Life In Christ*: 419.

fuels (or empowers) our call to love. Here's the deal...

1. I am incapable of loving Linda with the kind of love she deserves.
2. I am incapable of loving KHC with the kind of love you deserve.
3. I need God's love moving IN me and THROUGH me to love most effectively.

C. Perhaps, before going any further, we need to try and **define** God's love (*agápē*). Based on similar texts (John 3:16; 13:34; Eph. 5:2, 25), consider this definition: **God's love is an intensely affectionate, self-sacrificing, and caring commitment that shows itself in seeking the highest good of the one loved.**

1. Our intense affection often causes our human love conditional. We are attracted to people or things that bring us pleasure.
2. At its heart, biblical love is: A *commitment* that may be commanded. [*"Love one another even as I have loved you"* --John 13:34; 15:12]
3. But it is not a commitment without feeling, but: A *caring commitment*.
4. In other words, God's love involves delight, not just duty. [Because of what Jesus Christ has done.]
5. Also, this caring commitment is not just an attitude, but also an action: God's love shows itself in activity.
6. The action often requires self-sacrifice, which is seen supremely in Jesus going to the cross.
7. The goal of God's love is: The highest good of the one loved. What IS the highest good? That the person be awakened to God's self-sacrificing love and be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.
8. Thus: God's love allows for loving correction when needed. It's not syrupy or a façade.

D. One day the renowned 19<sup>th</sup> century English preacher Charles Spurgeon was walking through the countryside with a friend.

1. As they strolled along, Spurgeon noticed a barn with a weather vane on its roof. At the top of the vane were these words: GOD IS LOVE.
2. Spurgeon remarked to his companion that he thought this was a rather inappropriate place for such a message. Spurgeon said, "Weather vanes are changeable, but God's love is constant."

3. "I don't agree with you about those words, Charles," replied his friend. "You misunderstand the meaning. That sign is indicating a truth: Regardless of which way the wind blows, God is love."
- E. As we move toward the communion table I'd like to quickly consider two points:
1. **God's character of love.**
  2. **God's calling to love.**
- F. One at a time:
1. **God's character of love** (vs. 8-10)
    - a. *"The one who does not love does not know God, for **God is love**. <sup>9</sup> By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. <sup>10</sup> In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." --1 John 4:8-10*
    - b. When we are awakened to God's love and born again we begin to share His nature, his character (v. 9). God's love begins to create value in us – like our daughter created value by loving her *bunny blanky*.
      - 1) This gospel transformation is the act of the Holy Spirit connecting our dead, selfish hearts with God's living, loving heart so that His life becomes our life and His love becomes our love.
      - 2) A gospel transformation creates the connection between God's love for us and our love for each other.
    - c. V. 10 is yet another declaration of the gospel: *it's not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be a **propitiation** for our sins.*
      - 1) *Propitiation* means that God moves on our behalf to satisfy His own wrath.
      - 2) The aim of that sending, John says, was to bear our punishment for sin (propitiation) and thus be the one who RECEIVES the wrath of God and REMOVES the wrath of God.

## 2. God's calling to love (vs. 11-16)

### a. V. 11 – The Word Ought (to Love One Another)

- 1) How are we to understand this word “ought”?
- 2) *“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also **ought** to love one another.”* --1 John 4:11
- 3) It would be easy to get moralistic here...“You SHOULD love one another!”
- 4) But John has not forgotten what he wrote verses 7-8: *“Whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”* --1 John 4:7-8 [These vs. identify the gospel as the transforming power.]
- 5) When John says, “We ought to love each other,” he is identifying the imperative that flows out of the gospel declaration (indicative).
- 6) John is saying that Christians *ought* to love -- the way fish ought to swim in water, the way birds ought to fly in the air, the way peaches ought to be sweet, and the way lemons ought to be sour. It becomes who we are.

### b. Look at v. 12: *“No one has ever beheld God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us and **His love is perfected in us.**”* --1 John 4:12

- 1) When we are born again, God Himself is imparted to us. The God of the universe dwells in us and sheds abroad His love in and then through our hearts.
- 2) God's aim is that this love be matured, or completed – eventually it WILL be perfected in us when we go to meet with Him.
- 3) \*\*Finally, notice the phrase “His love” in verse 12. The love that we have as a believer is not “kind of like” God's love, it is an extension of God's love – first IN us and then THROUGH us to others. [Common grace vs. special or saving grace.]

## III. CONCLUSION

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- A. C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*: "To love at all is to be vulnerable; love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung, and possibly broken. If you want to be sure of keeping it intact you must give your heart to no one; lock it up safe in the coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket - safe, dark, motionless, and airless it will change; it will not be broken, but it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, and irredeemable. The only place, outside of heaven, where you can be safe from all the dangers of love is hell."<sup>3</sup>
- B. How can God be perfectly holy AND perfectly loving? God's holiness and love intersect at the cross...
- C. Enjoy Me Poem by Teresa of Avila

Just these two words He spoke  
changed my life: *Enjoy Me*.

What a burden I thought I was to carry--  
a [cross], as did He.  
Love once said to me, "I know a song,  
Would you like to hear it?  
And laughter came from every brick in the street  
And from every pore in the sky.  
After a night of prayer, he  
changed my life when  
He sang, *Enjoy Me*.

Communion – A celebration of God's love

1. The deliverance from our slavery to sin -- On the night before His death, Jesus gathered with His disciples in the upper room to eat the Passover meal. Every year the Jewish people met together to celebrate the Passover, which was a special meal designed by God to commemorate the deliverance of Israel from Egypt.
2. The celebration of a new and living covenant -- Jesus took that ancient feast and transformed it into a meal with new meaning when He instructed His disciples to drink the cup and eat the bread in remembrance of His death on their behalf. Therefore, the cross (Christ Event) has become the greatest redemptive event in history.

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<sup>3</sup> Lewis, C.S. *The Four Loves*, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich 1960: 169-170.