

God is Love

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[0 : 00] And turn in your Bibles to 1 John 4, 1 John 4, and we'll be reading verses 7 through 12.

This is God's Word. Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who has been born of God knows God.

Whoever does not love God does not know God, because God is love. 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 the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

[1 : 11] Let's hear his word preached. There are few words in society more popular than the word love.

People love the idea of love. People love to talk about love. People love to sing about love. People love to read about love, to dream of love, to experience love.

Hallmark has an entire channel dedicated to the idea of love. Singers and songwriters seem to sometimes only be able to produce songs that are about love and the loss of that love.

We have a holiday devoted entirely to love. Even in sports, brotherly love is often the driving force for teams to play well. A guy will get interviewed after a game and he'll say, I did this for the guys in the locker room.

I love them. Few words more popular than love. But couldn't we also say that few words are less defined, less clearly understood than the word love?

[2 : 24] What do we mean when we're talking about love? Do we have a true understanding of love? There is so much that passes in our world as love.

So much promoted as love. But are we striking at the heart of it? Do we have a clear understanding of love? Well, here is God's word for us.

To help us to understand love. Our passage this evening is all about it. And as we're going to see, biblical love is very different from the kind of love that gets pitched in our world.

We're going to see four truths tonight about love that are set before us in God's word. Four truths about love. Here's the first truth. Love originates from God.

Love originates from God. Read again verses 7 and 8 with me. Beloved, let us love one another.

[3 : 26] For love is from God. And whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love.

Any reporter or journalist will tell you that you need to have good sources. A good journalist is not just one who writes compelling articles.

A good journalist is not just one who tells the facts. A good journalist is one who has good sources behind what they say. So we need to have good sources as well for ourselves.

We need to be like a good reporter when it comes to understanding love. What is the source for what we think and believe about love?

In a world that loves to talk about love, all that talk is often devoid of God. He is left entirely out of the conversation.

[4 : 27] He's left out of the lyrics of the song. He makes no appearance in the Hallmark movie. God has very little to do with love in the world's eyes.

So very often love finds its source not in God but in me. And in my own feelings. I am the ultimate determiner of what love is or isn't.

The source of my understanding of love is me. How I feel. How I'm affirmed or not affirmed. How I'm received or not received.

It's about me and my standards. In some way or another, I become the source of understanding what love is. And so it's no surprise that you might hear it said, love yourself.

What I think and believe about love begins and ends with me. But here in God's word, God is front and center in the conversation.

[5 : 32] God is the source. We can't talk about love without talking about God. Why? Because 1 John 4, 8 says, God is love.

And that means that God is our source for understanding love. It is who he is. And if he has made us to be his children, then we will love as well.

It is now in our spiritual DNA. We will bear a family resemblance to our heavenly father in our love for one another.

It's an evidence of our salvation. If we've been born of God and we know God, then we will love one another because God is love.

It's only three words. Just three words. But we can fall into a lot of error when we talk about the reality that God is love.

[6 : 27] So let's think about three errors that we need to avoid. Three errors that we want to avoid in talking about how God is love. Here's the first error. Equating the idea that God loves with the idea that God is love.

It's one thing to say that someone loves. We say that kind of thing all the time. He loves his wife. She loves her grandkids. We talk about people loving others all the time.

But here, John takes it one step further. He doesn't just say that God loves. He says God is love. That's very different.

I may say that I love my wife, but I do not say and should not say that I am love. But when it comes to God, that is exactly what we say of him because that is exactly what he says of himself.

He is love. He is the standard because love is one of his attributes. It is who he is. It is his divine character.

[7 : 39] It's not just that he possesses love or has love. In that case, his love could grow. It could diminish. And in that case, we would be in a lot of trouble.

We would be fearful that God's love might be lost on us. That's how fallen, sinful humans are. You may love someone today and then three months later, you don't love that person anymore.

And we see that kind of cheapened version of love in the world. How much worse if that were the way that God is. That God might love me less tomorrow than he loves me today.

So often we cling to this wonderful promise in Scripture. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. But think how often that promise, how that promise would lose its strength if God's love might change.

If that love might shrink on us. Sure, nothing can separate us from his love, but we can't be sure how much he loves us to begin with. We would be living in constant fear and uncertainty and we would be tempted ourselves to try to win or earn more of God's love.

[9 : 05] If his love ebbs and flows, we're always going to be afraid that we're on the cusp of losing it. But God doesn't just possess a measure of love.

1 John 4 tells us that God is love. It is who he is. If he has set his love upon you, you have his love. You can't lose his love because he could not love you any less.

If God loves you, you're loved in the fullest sense of the word. Nothing can separate you from that kind of perfect love because God is love.

Here's the second error to avoid. Saying that God is only love. This is an attribute of God, but it's not the only attribute.

Love is not all that God is in the sense that love is infinitely perfect in all of his attributes. He is entirely loving and entirely just and entirely holy and entirely good.

[10 : 13] The list could go on and on of all of the attributes that God is perfectly all the time. No one attribute is elevated above the rest.

No one attribute is diminished below the rest. God is love, as John has told us here in this letter. John has also told us that God is light.

And these are not two attributes that are somehow warring at each other and sometimes God is love and sometimes God is light or sometimes God is just and sometimes God is forgiving. No, he is all of his attributes perfectly all the time.

God is love. Now here's the third and the final error that we must avoid. And it's really not an error like the previous two. The other two are misunderstandings of what it means to say God is love. But the third error is much more than a misunderstanding. The third error, it is a sinful heart issue that we must resist.

[11:17] And it's this. Reversing the word order of God is love. And instead of saying that, we say love is God.

This isn't like basic addition of numbers. We can say 1 plus 3 equals 4. We could also flip this around and we could say 3 plus 1 equals 4.

Same thing. But reversing the word order of God is love is not the same thing. It is not like basic addition. It's like basic subtraction. 3 minus 1 equals 2.

But 1 minus 3 does not equal 2. It's not the same thing when you reverse the numbers in subtraction. So we can't reverse the word order and keep the same meaning.

That's what the world wants to do. That's what our flesh wants to do. That's what the devil wants us to do. Make love as we choose to conceive of it into a God that we worship.

[12:24] To put this false love on the throne of our hearts in the place of God. But to say that love is God is to break the very first commandment that God has given us.

You shall have no other gods before me. God is God and nothing and no one else can be in his place. And that includes love.

So love originates from God. It is an attribute of his divine character. And that means that we don't decide what love is. We don't understand, we don't measure God's love against our own ideas of what love is.

Human love is not the standard. Contrary to popular opinion, we don't know more about love than God does. We are not more loving than God is.

Scoffers like to say, oh, the Bible. The God of that Bible. He is so mean. Especially in the Old Testament. He's bigoted. He's cruel.

[13:33] He's bent on murder and revenge. He's not loving. We know what it means to love. First John teaches us here. We are not the authority on love.

It's the reverse. God is the authority. And so, we measure whatever we conceive of to be love against God himself and what he tells us of love.

Because he's the standard. He's the authority. That's the first truth that we will learn about love in our passage. Here's the second truth. Love is demonstrated by God.

So, love originates from God and now we're going to see that love is demonstrated by God.

Beginning in verse 9, let's read the next two verses. In this, the love of God was made manifest among us that God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him.

In this is love. Not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins. Okay, so love comes from God but we've said nothing of what that love looks like.

[14:48] What is God's love like? That's where verse 9 comes in. His love was made manifest among us. To say that it was made manifest among us means that it appeared.

It was revealed. He made it known. He showed us what his love is like and he did it by sending his son. Now, this is a Christmas text.

We don't normally associate 1 John 4 as a Christmas text. It's not Matthew 2. It's not Luke 2. It's not Isaiah 9. But 1 John 4 is a Christmas text in its own right.

God's love was made known. God's love appeared as a person. As 1 John 1-2 says, the life was made manifest.

God's love was put on display. It was put on display for us in the sending of his son into the world. Or as 1 Peter 1-20 says, he was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you.

[15:59] So God's love came down and here is what it looks like. The giving of his son. In not withholding his own son, God showed that to love is to sacrifice.

To love is to give of yourself for the good of another. Now in so many ways that is the opposite of how we might naturally conceive of the idea of love.

It is the opposite of how the world subtly deceives us into thinking about love. the false love of the world will ask, what can you give to me?

What can I get out of this relationship? How can I preserve myself? How can I improve for myself? The love of God says, here is what I give to you.

Here is who I give to you. My son. The false love of the world, it centers on self-indulgence. But the biblical true love of God centers on self-sacrifice.

[17:11] God sent his son into the world. And when Jesus came into the world, he didn't come to conquer the world. He didn't come to do an investigation and report back to his father about the mess of the world.

He came to humble himself to the point of death, even death on a cross. He came to die for the sins of his people in the world. Elsewhere in scripture, Romans 8, we read that the father did not withhold his son.

The one whom the father had loved from eternity past. The one whom the father had this perfect relationship and perfect fellowship with. He left his heavenly throne and he came to us.

God's love is sacrificial because the son was sent and he was sent to die. He was sent to lay down his life and he did it, John 10 says, willingly.

He willingly gave up his life. He willingly went to the cross for the sins of his people to be the propitiation for our sins.

[18:21] Meaning that he turned away God's wrath. He turned away the wrath of God that was directed to us and he took the full blow of that wrath.

He paid the price for our sins. And what was that price? It was death. There must be bloodshed for the forgiveness of sins, Hebrews 9.22 says.

And Christ shed his blood in our place. So the father sent the son to be condemned for sinners such as us. That is love.

That is love on display. The sacrificial giving for the sake of others. And so in sending his son, he was giving up his son and he was doing it for us.

For our good. And what good was that? What does verse 9 say? That we might live through him. So he gave up his son that we might not die but that we might live through him.

[19:27] So do you have life in Jesus Christ today? Do you recognize your own need for a savior? Turn to Christ.

Cry out to him for forgiveness of your sins if you have not trusted in him. He came to give life and to give life abundantly. God came to earth.

He was born in a manger and he was born to then one day bear the sins of his people upon the cross. And he did that that we might receive by faith the gift of eternal life.

So John is telling us that there is no love story that this world could dream up that could top this. Kids, I have a question for you.

Kids, have you ever heard the story of how your parents met? And you're thinking, no, we haven't. Here's some good dinnertime conversation tonight. How did mom and dad meet?

[20:31] Well, sometimes when husbands and wives meet, the story of that meeting is a little different. There are some key discrepancies. Sometimes maybe those discrepancies are small, like the husband thinks the first date was at a certain restaurant and the wife says that restaurant wasn't even there yet.

Other times the husband thinks that he was so smooth in conversation, but the wife says he was a nervous wreck. Other times those differences are a lot bigger, though.

Other times the husband will think, I initiated that conversation. I went up to her and I introduced myself. And she'll say, no, I smiled and I said hello.

And so there's this debate that ensues. Kids, you might experience that at the dinner table tonight. But when it comes to our relationship with God, there is no debate.

When it comes to our relationship with God, the answer is abundantly clear. It is known and it's agreed upon by all. We did not initiate. John says it.

[21:38] This is love. Not that we loved God, but that he loved us. We didn't woo God into loving us.

We didn't beckon him with our love. We didn't send flowers and a handwritten card. We didn't shower him with our affection. We spit on him.

We reviled him. We mocked him. We stripped him. We tore his clothes and put a crown of thorns on his head.

We abused him, beat him, nailed him on a cross to die. We did everything that we could to spurn his love.

God's love was made manifest among us and we didn't just reject his love, we sought to put his love to death. We didn't love God. We hated him.

[22 : 39] We were his sworn enemies. And it was while we were his enemies, Romans 5 says, that God came towards us.

That God made peace with us and reconciled us to himself. Not when we decided to put down our weapons of war. Not when we called a truce and offered some terms of peace to him.

We were yet still raging against him. So we have to get this order right. In this is love. Not that we loved God, but that he loved us.

And if we think any differently, if we think that we loved God first, or that at least we met him halfway, if we think that we had enough good in our hearts to warrant his sending of his son, if we think that somehow we contributed to the relationship, we are minimizing the wonderful truth of what his love is.

You know the hymn, what wondrous love is this. Whose love was the cause? Whose love was the cause that moved the Lord of bliss to bear the dreadful curse for our souls?

[24 : 01] It wasn't my wondrous love. It wasn't your wondrous love. It was God's. A love that led him to send his son to save. Not good people, not people who were upstanding citizens, not people who were halfway decent, but to save people who were dead in their trespasses and sins, darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God.

This is love. Not that we loved God, but that he loved us. And that love moves us to obedience, which is the third truth about love from this passage that we must consider.

Love is commanded by God. Jump back to verse 7. Verse 7 says, Beloved, let us love one another. And then verse 11 says, Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

So we must understand, and I hope we have seen, that first God and his love we grasp. We see his love. We understand his love. That has to be driven home.

We must understand that God loves by giving of himself for our sake. Because it's that love and understanding that love that then compels us to love one another.

[25 : 24] His love for us is like the blueprint for how we then love one another. If we don't grasp his love for us, then we won't live out that kind of love towards one another.

His love is a giving love. So that means that we're to give of ourselves for the sake of, for the benefit of one another. So we love as God has loved us.

So we have the blueprint. Like this masterful architect, God has given us a perfect design for living as those who love. The lines are straight.

Every measurement is recorded. Everything on the blueprint is to scale. It's clear. It's precise. It's laid out. We have it right here in 1 John 4.

Look at how God has loved you. That's the blueprint. So don't start erasing the lines. Don't start trying to put white out on the blueprint, to change it.

[26 : 26] That's the way the world, the flesh, and the devil, that's how they want us to do it. All that is opposed to God is whispering in our ear, here's a different way. Let's do something different with this blueprint of love.

And yet the reality is that the enemy's blueprint is vastly inferior to God's. The enemy's blueprint is drawn on crumpled up paper that's been kind of pulled back out.

It's got coffee stains on it. The lines lead to nowhere. It's scribbled on with crayons like a preschooler. Don't follow that design for love. It is garbage, and it's garbage because it's the kind of blueprint that puts love of self at the center of what is called love.

God has given us his good design right here for what love is and how to love. Follow this design. Even when we don't feel like it.

Sometimes love is hard. But we aren't told to feel a certain way here in the text. We're told to live in a certain way.

[27 : 39] Because love is not a feeling but an action. God isn't commanding us here to muster up warm sentiments for one another. He's commanding us to act in a certain way towards each other.

Now of course we can and we should expect that as we love our feelings follow. It's a wonderful reality that we grow in affection and warmth for those that we love.

But don't start with the feelings. Don't act out of the feelings. We choose to love when we feel the deep strong affection and we choose to love even when we don't.

Even when it may be lacking. That's hard though isn't it? To love when we don't feel like it? Or even more to love when it might hurt?

To love when we have been hurt? Now let me say that there are times that it is best and wisest when it is most loving to distance ourselves from a person.

[28 : 45] But there are other times for many of us, this being most of the time, in the ordinary moments of life, that we need to move toward a person, not away.

love. So it's hard to give of ourselves instead of to gain for ourselves. It's far easier to put myself at the center of love, to buy into and to follow after the false love of the world, to think, what can I get out of this?

Is anyone going to serve me? Or I hope that so and so is listening to this so they will love me better. love. We must turn away from that kind of thinking.

Biblical love, a love that comes from God, comes with no strings attached, with no expectation of getting something in return, with no demands or criteria for who a worthy recipient of that love might be.

So how do we love each other in that kind of way? 1 John teaches us to look away from ourselves, to look to God. Look to God in his great love for you and let that serve as your motivation.

[29 : 57] That's not the only motivation that God has given us in his word. Earlier already in 1 John we've seen another motivation to love one another and here's that motivation.

God has not simply shown his love to you. God has given his love to you. It's in you. It resides in you if you are his child.

Remember the words of 1 John 2.15 If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. So John is saying those who don't love the world, who are God's people, they show by their not loving the world that they have the love of the Father in them.

It resides in them. We don't simply have a model for love. We don't just have a blueprint for love. We have the love of the Father in us.

We have the Spirit of God at work in our hearts to produce the kind of love that we're talking about here. So we keep working to love one another.

[31 : 08] Even in our weakness, even in our own sinful failings, even when we get hurt, even when we do all of those things, we keep working to love one another.

And we keep remembering that God is at work in us to produce that love. So that's the third truth that we learn about love in this passage.

Love is commanded by God. Here's the fourth truth. Our love makes our God known in this world. Our love makes known our God in this world.

Just verse 12. No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us.

We've already seen tonight that the Bible teaches us God is invisible. What a helpful beginning to our service to consider God is spirit. God has no body.

[32 : 11] And because he has no body, he can't be seen. He is the invisible God. But then Jesus entered into our world. God, who is invisible, took on flesh.

And so the Bible says things like, our Savior appeared, or for the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, or he was manifested in the flesh.

Christ Jesus came into the world. When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son. So all kinds of passages in the Bible, just a few that we could have there.

All of these passages that speak of the visible arrival of God. He who is invisible took on flesh. He became a baby.

And so Colossians 1 15 can rightly conclude he is the image of the invisible God. John 1 18 as well, no one has ever seen God, the only God, who is at the Father's side.

[33 : 17] He has made him known. So we have not seen God the Father. But God the Son, in taking on a human body, has made the invisible God known.

And so that's why Jesus himself would say in his earthly ministry, whoever has seen me, has seen the Father.

Jesus is God in the flesh. If you've seen Jesus, you've seen God, the invisible God made known. And yet, Jesus is now in heaven.

After he finished his work on earth, he ascended once again to his Father's right hand. And he returned in his human body to the Father. That's where he is now.

He's in heaven. The invisible God is no longer visible to the world through the Son. Because the Son is no longer in the world. That's no problem, John says.

[34 : 19] Because now, God is visible through those that the Son has redeemed. We now make God known in this world.

And how do we do it? He doesn't give us a grand plan, something that blows your mind to hear. What does he say? He says that we do it by our love for one another.

No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, people will see what our God is like. As God abides in us, his love is perfected in us.

And through that, his love is made known to the world. His glory is to be spread abroad. So the one who made himself known through his Son now makes himself known through the people that his Son has saved.

What an incredible privilege, and yet also what an incredibly high calling. We testify to the world of our God.

[35 : 24] We make him known by the way that we treat one another. So may the world see the one true God as they see our love in the body.

May they see how different this love is, how supernatural it is compared to any kind of love that is found in the world. As Jesus said in John 13 35, by this all people will know that you are my disciples.

If you have love for one another, and as the world sees our love for one another, a love that gives of itself, may that counterintuitive sacrificial love point them to the God who is love, who sent his Son into the world to shed his blood for our sins.

Let's pray together. What wondrous love indeed is this Father, that you would send your Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Condemned in our place, the full wrath of God suffered in our place. Thank you for loving us even when we were your enemies, sins, when we had no desire for you.

[36 : 53] We pray, Father, that the love with which you have loved us, that we would then love each other out of that, and that our love would be a demonstration to this world of the heart transformation that has taken place.

We need your spirit to love in that way. We can't do it in and of ourselves because indeed it is a supernatural love. so be our help, we pray. Enable us to love one another in this way and to testify to the world of who you are and of your great love.

We gladly rejoice. We gladly proclaim that you, God, God is love. We pray, Lord, that the world would see that through us.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.