

What is God's Love Like?

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[0 : 00] Let's open God's word to 1 John chapter 4. I'm going to read 1 John chapter 4 and verses 7 through 21.

! 1 John 4 beginning at verse 7. Dear friends, let us love one another for love comes from God.

Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

Whoever does not love 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 an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we 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. We know that we live in him and he in us because he has given us of his Spirit.

[1 : 15] And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.

And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him.

In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment because in this world we are like him.

There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, I love God, yet hates his brother, he is a liar.

[2 : 16] For anyone who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command.

Whoever loves God must also love his brother. Whoever loves God. You've seen the young lady or maybe you've been the young lady or the young man pulling the daisy apart saying he loves me.

He loves me not. He loves me. He loves me not. Around and around until the last one is pulled.

What does the last one say?

I guess it depends on how many petals God put on that particular daisy as to whether it was a good answer or a bad answer.

Just to help you out, the ordinary field daisy has 34 petals. So statistically speaking, if you begin with he loves me not, you might get he loves me at the end.

[3 : 21] But no guarantees. Well, he loves me. He loves me not is not a game that we have to play with God. And I'm talking especially to you if you are a Christian.

You can pick any flower in the world and pull all of its petals off. And in the end it will say, he loves me.

And you can pull each one as you go. Say, he loves me. He loves me. He loves me. He loves me. And I'm not being trite either because he does love you.

You can say with the Apostle John, I am the disciple that Jesus loved. Ephesians 5.1 Be imitators of God, therefore as dearly loved children.

Dearly loved children. Ephesians 5.25 A word to husbands. Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church.

[4 : 28] Colossians 3.12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved. And I say how that needs to get inside of us.

That needs to get inside of us. That needs to change us. That is the light. That is the light. But so often we live our lives in the gloom and in the stuffiness, the undergrowth of some sort of thick forest where that light has a hard time penetrating down into our hearts.

The light never gets down to us. Our hearts are so covered with cares and worries and fears doubts and unbelief.

The light is shining. It's in our Bibles. We hear it preached. We know it in our own heads. The light is shining, but sometimes our hearts are so shady.

They're so gloomy. I probably have told you this illustration, but in the book, *The Hobbit*, Bilbo Baggins and the dwarves are walking through a large forest.

[5 : 43] It takes a number of weeks to get through the forest. And the forest's name is Mirkwood. And for weeks, they don't see the sun. And for weeks, they don't feel the breeze on their face.

And the whole thing is so dim and stuffy and stifling. But one time near the end, Bilbo, the hobbit, climbs a tree and he climbs up all the way to the tip top of the trees and he finally breaks through the forest, the thick canopy, and the sun is shining and it has been shining the whole time.

And the wind is blowing. Well, I want this series, in a way, to be like that trip up to that tree top. To get up to the tip top of the trees.

And so we can live down here in the shade so often and in the stuffiness. But what we want to do is climb up the trees and behold his love.

To behold his love. Now, we've looked at behold his love. And, or behold this love that John talks about in John chapter 3. And we've looked at God is love.

[6 : 58] And today I want to, or this evening I want to look at what is God's love like? And we don't have a particular passage. We're going to be looking at several passages, a variety of passages.

But we're asking this question, what is God's love like? And, we don't want to look at it impersonally. It's easy to sort of, it would be easy for me and it would be easy for you to hear this as sort of a systematic theology lecture where we say, well God's love is like this and it's like that and it's like this.

And that, of course, might have value. But we want to look at it personally. And to ask, how does the Bible say that God loves you? What's God's love like to you?

So we're not talking about systematic theology so much as, what is God's heart? How does God love me? What is His love like toward me? So how does God love you?

[8 : 05] Now, remember, this isn't going to be a whole lot different than asking, what is God like? Now, why would that be? Why would God's love, what's God's love like and what God is like, why wouldn't those be very different questions?

Well, last week we saw that God is love. So the attributes of God are very much the same as His own attributes. But it's not just that.

It's because when we love someone, what are we doing? We're essentially giving them ourselves. We're giving them whatever we can to bless them and we're doing that out of ourselves.

And love is essentially self-giving. In marriage, a man and a wife give themselves to each other. So who gives this woman to be married to this man?

And the Father gives the bride there away. But the real giving away is when they promise to each other, I'm going to love you like this.

[9 : 13] from now on, I'm going to take you to have and to hold from this day forth in sickness and health and so on. Love is self-giving. It's giving away yourself.

Moms, when they're first, have their first baby, they begin to realize that fact that if I'm going to love this baby, it's going to mean I'm going to have to give myself away.

no more sleepy nine hours. I'm going to get to sleep three and then I'm going to be up. I'm going to have to give myself to this baby. And that time and that life grows as that baby grows.

And now we're giving more time and more energy and more thought and more words. Love is self-giving. And so, when you, what your love is like is what you're going to be like or what you're like is what your love is going to be like.

So, if I'm a very selfish person, I'm interested in giving stuff to myself, giving life to me, then my love, is it going to be big or is it going to be small?

[10 : 25] Well, it's going to be naturally small. I'm not going to give very much of myself away if I'm most interested in giving to myself. And if I'm not a very wise man, then I'm not going to love very wisely.

My love's going to be foolish. It's going to be short-sighted. It's going to be simplistic. It's going to be misguided. But if I am wise, then my love is likewise going to be a wise love.

So, love is self-giving. And so, God's love is going to be like God. And so, that's what we're thinking about. How does God love you?

What is God's love like towards you? I'm going to give you some numbers to keep track of. Just first, second, third, and we're going to go through several. And we're going to basically continue this sermon next week.

We're only going to get to some of the characteristics of how God loves you. Today, we're just going to get to several. And the first is that God loves you perfectly.

[11 : 33] God loves you perfectly. He loves you perfectly. He loves you perfectly because He is perfect.

He is perfect, so He loves perfectly. Jesus said, be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect. And it's interesting, in that context, Jesus is talking about how you love people.

The perfection of the Father is seen in how He loves people. God's love is perfect. God couldn't love you, Christian, any better than He does.

He couldn't love you any better than He does. He is perfect. His way is perfect. His word is perfect. His love is perfect. And so we could put God's love for you, you could put God's love for you under a microscope.

And you could look at every atom, every molecule, every atom, and every atom of that love would be perfect. And if there was such a microscope where we could dial it down and focus it in on the protons and the neutrons and all the little bits that make up an atom, every single one of those would be perfect.

[12 : 58] It would be blameless. It couldn't be any better. It would be faultless. The Lord is upright. He's upright.

He's my rock. And there is no unrighteousness in him. Every fiber of God's being is perfect. He's perfect in wisdom, perfect in righteousness, perfect in kindness, perfect in faithfulness, perfect in holiness, and all of that perfection is perfectly united in his love.

Love binds them all together in perfect unity. And so how does God love you, Christian? He loves you perfectly. He couldn't love you any better than he does.

There's nothing missing. There's nothing more you could want. There's nothing more that you could need. there's no lack in any aspect of it.

And sometimes we think there should be more. Sometimes we question the wisdom of his love. If God loves me, then why would he let this happen in my life? We ask those questions.

[14 : 14] We say those things. But it's not just me, is it, who have been proven wrong again and again and again. I doubt it.

But I was wrong to doubt. And haven't we had to come back and say, I see it now. It was right. It was good.

It was perfect. It's just what I needed. And so dear Christian, you are dearly loved. Dearly loved. More than that, you are perfectly loved.

So that's the first thing. And really, what we're going to be doing from here on out is just unpacking what does perfect love towards you look like? Well, secondly, God's love is infinite.

It's infinite. The Westminster Catechism asks and answers this question. What is God? God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable.

[15 : 14] And then it goes on. But he is infinite. He's boundless. He's not bound by any created thing. that there's no human or creature measurement or standard that we could put on God and say he is such and such.

He is this much. He's infinite. And so how does he love you, Christian? Think about this. How much does the God of the universe, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit love you?

He loves you without boundaries. He loves you without reservations. He loves you without limits. In the 1990s, a rock singer named Meatloaf had a song, go to number one, and the title was, and the key line of it was, I will do anything for love, but I won't do that.

I'm no lyrical songwriting genius, but that doesn't appear to make a lot of sense. But that kind of grand gesture, I will do anything for love, is very common and typical in our world.

And whether Meatloaf meant it, what way he meant it, I don't know, but in real life, there is always that, I won't do that. I won't do that.

[16 : 48] I can't do that. There's a limit. human love always has limits. There's things we can't do. There's things we wish we could do, but we don't have the power, we don't have the resources,

things that we would think it would be better if it was that way, if I could love her or him or them like that.

Things we can't do, things we won't do. We can love someone with what we are and what we have and that is all that we can love them with and we are creatures.

In comparison to God, we are small creatures, finite. But Paul said, Christ's love for us is incomprehensible, surpasses knowledge.

and so who can grasp how wide and high and long and deep is this love? It's infinite in size.

He loves you and you can't measure, it can't be measured how much he loves you. His love for you is without limits, without boundaries, without borders.

[18:07] And so, brother, sister, if you have a hurting soul, apply this to yourself. His love for you is without a limit.

A.W. Pink wrote this, His love is without limits. There is a depth to it that none can fathom. There is a height to it which none can scale, no one can climb it.

There is a length and breadth to it that defies measurement by any creature standard. And he goes on and says, it is an ocean that swells higher than all of the mountains of opposition.

So think of whatever opposition you could put there. And the greatest is our sin. Our greatest is our rebellion against him.

but it is an ocean that swells higher than all the opposition against it. When he has set his love on you, there was no mountain, no obstacle that was going to be able to overcome or to be able to stop his love.

[19:20] And so we sing, oh, the deep, deep love of Jesus, vast, beyond all measure, boundless, and free. So think for eternity to come, God's love is going to be like a tidal wave, towering stories and stories above you, crashing into you.

His love for you is boundless. Now how do we know that? Because that is the message, that is one of the messages of the cross. We can go to the cross and we can say that God didn't say I will do anything for love, but I won't do that.

Christ gave himself for you. He was punched and beaten for you.

Nails pierced his skin and his muscle and went straight into the wood and men spit on him and soldiers stripped him and mocked him and ridiculed him.

There was no line though. There was no boundary. That Jesus said, I will go this far and I will go no further. He took the worst that man could give and he took the wrath of God.

[20:52] God's wrath. God put his wrath upon his son. And that is saying something. There's nothing the father won't do. No boundary. He can't.

He won't cross. It's not needed. That's true. and it's not necessary.

And it's. But I will say this. If he had to do it all again. If he had to do it all again, he would do it all again. Because the very love that he displayed in the cross is the same love that beats in his own heart.

It still is boundless. still as limitless as it was 2,000 years ago. And so my dear Christian, when Paul says you are dearly loved, he's saying that there's no measure to it.

There's no end to its perfection. There's no this is an infinite love. Well, that's the second. The third thing is it's a wise love.

[22:07] It's a wise love. Philippians 1, 9, Paul prays and asks that God would make their love, that their love might abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.

Now, they loved each other. The Philippians loved each other. They loved each other. But their love could still, it still needed to abound.

It still needed to grow more and more in knowledge and depth of insight. They could love in a wiser way. They could love in a better way. They could think more deeply about what that person needed or understand that person.

There was a way that they could love them in a smarter, better way. And he's praying, I'm sure he's saying, I'm so glad that you love each other, but I'm praying that your love might grow, abound more and more in knowledge and understanding.

But God's love is boundless. We've just said that, but it's boundless in wisdom. And so, his love can't abound anymore in knowledge or depth of insight.

[23:18] His love is full of knowledge. And this is such a comfort. His love understands you perfectly. And his love understands the situation perfectly.

His love knows the very best thing that you need in that particular situation that you are in presently. His love knows exactly the best thing for you.

He never scratches his head and says, I love them, but I don't know what to do. We say that, don't we? We don't know what to do. We love them.

We're committed to doing them good, but we don't know the best thing to do for them. We don't understand what they truly need or what would be the best for them. But, dear child of God, God never says that about you.

He never scratches his head. He's never at a loss as to how to love you. His love has an open, four-lane, eight-lane highway of wisdom.

[24 : 28] He knows exactly what to bring to you, and he knows exactly how you need it and when you need it and everything about it. And so, it's hard sometimes for us to love people.

Not because we don't want to love them. Sometimes we just don't know what is the best thing to do for them. We don't know what real love looks like in this situation. Do you ever say that to yourself? I don't know what it looks like in this particular situation to love this person. you go on a hike with little children and you know they tire out easily.

And you get pretty far out there and they start dragging and they maybe even start complaining. Now, sometimes they need a break, don't they? Sometimes they need water and a snack and just to sit down for five minutes.

But you know what? Sometimes they need to stop complaining and they need to push on without water, without a snack, without a break. Sometimes they need a comfort and sometimes they need to learn to buck up, power through, push through a situation.

[25 : 38] But when you're in that moment, it's hard to know which one it is. It's hard to know which one is loving them best. But God's love is perfect in wisdom.

He always knows how to love us the best way. He knows when we need to push through. He knows when we don't need removed from the situation. He knows when we don't need a break.

He knows when we need to learn to trust Him and to keep walking. But then He also knows when we need to sit down. And He knows when we need a break and a snack and something to drink. His love is perfect in wisdom. God is loving you wisely. And so you can be sure that what you are going through right now, good or bad, relief or difficulty, you can be sure that God is displaying, is loving you wisely.

So you can be sure of the trials and the difficulties, the challenges, whatever they might be, whatever, if they are from God's hand, then they are perfectly wise, perfectly what you need.

[26 : 52] And it can't be anything else. It can't be anything else than that. So what comfort and what peace just comes from believing that, that from my Father's wise bestowment, these things are upon me.

And so we don't have a foolish lover. He's enthusiastic. He's all in. He loves us with all that He is. He holds nothing back, but He's no fool either, rushing about as much hurting us as helping us. His love is perfect in wisdom. Fourth, His love is self kindled.

Self kindled. We sang this last week as our closing hymn. Oh, love of God, how deep and great, far deeper than man's deepest hate.

hate. Self-fed. Self-kindled like the light. So does God love us because we love Him?

[28 : 02] Well, just there in that song it said, no, it's man's hatred and God's love is far deeper than man's deepest hate. And then He says it's self-kindled like the light.

He's talking about the sun. Now, I don't know about any of you, but I don't think that you did anything this morning to make the sun come out and to shine upon you.

Or at least attempt to shine upon you. The sun doesn't shine on us because we are worthy. We don't woo and coax the sun to come out.

We don't woo and coax the light to come upon us. The sun is self-fed, self-kindled. The light comes to us all on its own.

And that's God's love. He loved us before we existed. Now, if He loved us before we existed, doesn't that say that His love comes from Himself and not from us?

[29 : 07] We love because there's something lovely in another person. That goes without saying. Someone is lovable, so we love them.

But there was nothing in us that would prompt God to love us. There was nothing in us that could or would prompt God's love. In Deuteronomy, Moses says to Israel, the Lord did not set His affection

on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other people. You didn't have any sort of worldly qualities that would say, oh, God would say, oh, I want these people. No, he says the exact opposite for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because God loved you that He set His affection on you and chose you. And so did you get that? He loved you because He loved you. He loved you because He loved you. His love was totally self-kindled, self-started. It's not to say that it's unreasonable, reasonable, or sporadic, or just accidental. [30 : 13] It's just to say that whatever reasons God has for loving us, they come from His own heart. They come from Him. And He loves us.

He loves us. And so we love Him because He first loved us. He set His affection on us. So we have set our affection upon Him. And so before you ever had a particular love for God, God had a particular love for you. we did everything to repel Him. It was like we were calculating how to make God not love us. We'll rebel, we'll disobey, we'll misunderstand, we'll lie about, we will just ignore Him, we will belittle Him. that was us. We would, if we received what He received from us, we would never have loved us. But that was us.

[31 : 25] But we love Him because He first loved us. I just want to say, if you're a Christian, if He loved you when there was no good thing to commend you to Him, if there was nothing good in you, nothing that could or would prompt His love for you, I want to say this, how much more now that He is beginning to put something good into you?

When He's joined you to His Son and put His Holy Spirit in you and has made you to be born again and now He's by His Spirit creating righteousness and holiness and love. How much more now that God is changing us? How much more now that God in Christ is living with us? If He loved you then, won't He love you and doesn't He love you now? So don't think that every sin drives Him away. Don't think that every sin loses His love or affection. He knew exactly what you were. when He set His love upon you. And your sin doesn't surprise God. Your sin doesn't shock Him.

[32 : 54] And it ultimately doesn't turn His heart away from you. But we need to be straight. Your love will cloud that fellowship. Your love will grieve His heart or your sin will grieve His heart.

It will cloud that fellowship. But He doesn't finally love you because of anything you've done or anything you will do.

He has loved us because He has set His love upon us. He loves us because He's the God of love. And if we truly understand that, and if we really get it in our hearts and in our bones where we know that kind of love, that doesn't make us careless.

It doesn't make us careless about obedience. It doesn't make us careless about His love. If anything, it makes us more careful. Because if this kind of God wants to have a relationship with me, then let me do everything to have a relationship with Him.

If He has so loved me, then oh, let me love Him in return. And so this truth that God's love is self-kindled, it's from Himself, it's not owing to anything in us, on one hand, it should make us more confident in our relationship with Him, but on the other hand, it should make us more careful in our relationship with Him.

[34 : 28] Now, fifth and last, His love is full of mercy and grace. His love is full of mercy and grace. We're going to talk about some other things next week, Lord willing, but this is where we're going to draw this one to a close.

His love is full of mercy and grace. Mercy is love in the face of weakness, in the face of frailty, in the face of hurt, in pain, in damage, in need.

grace is love in the face of guilt and sin. And His love is full of both.

And so His love, He doesn't love us because we're perfect and strong and whole and healthy. His love doesn't hurt us only when we're happy.

and we're not suffering. You know, when Jesus was teaching His disciples how to live and how to minister and how to love people, He left the synagogues.

[35 : 42] He didn't hang out just with the rabbis and talk theology all day. When Jesus was teaching His disciples how to live, He took them out of the synagogue and He took them to the poor and to the sick and to the needy and the demon possessed.

He took them out to be with the disgraced and the ashamed and the outcasts. See, He took them where His own love took Him.

His love is full of pity. His love is full of grace. He loves us. He loves us still. We hurt and we ache and we can hardly lift a finger sometimes for Him because of our pain or distraction or whatever it might be.

And yet, He loves us even then. So mothers, you know that you love your children not just when your children can do their chores. mothers, you love them especially when they can't, when they're so tired or when they're so sick.

When they can't do anything for you, that is the precise moment when your heart rushes out to them and you hold them. And mothers love their children even when their children sin against them.

[37 : 08] You know that, mothers. mothers. Why does it hurt sometimes so much to be a mom? Because the one hurting you is the one that you love so dearly.

Well, your mother, then you mothers, you understand something of God's heart. You know God's heart in Hosea chapter 11. He says, my people are determined to turn from me.

Then He a couple lines later, He says, but how can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? My heart is changed within me.

All my compassion is aroused. That's God's love, not in the face of obedience. That's God's love in the face of disobedience.

God's saying, how can I give you up? How can I give you over to punishment? And He says, no, my compassion, my bowels, my sympathy, it's all aroused within me.

[38 : 23] And that's just to say that God's love is full of mercy and full of grace. It's full of grit. It's full of stick-to-it-ness.

It has determination. God isn't a fair-weather fan. He's a die-hard fan. If He's any kind of fan, He's going to love you through thick and thin.

And so the bruised reed, the reed that's been punched and beat up and it's down, He doesn't break.

And the smoldering wick, that wick that's about to go out, it doesn't have any life hardly left in it.

He doesn't snuff out. No, instead He loves you. Christian, He loves you in that situation. So that's your God. That's your Savior.

That's the Father. That's the Son. That's the Holy Spirit. And those are the Father, Son, and Spirit that we believe in.

[39 : 25] Well, there is so much to say, and we're going to, again, look more next week. But let me just say, this is the love that John says, behold it.

Behold, what kind of love the Father has lavished upon us. And so, just to end with a few questions, I ask you, what are you going to do this week to behold that love?

What are you going to do this week to behold this love that we're talking about? Will you get up earlier to behold that love?

Will you put away your phone to behold that love? Will you turn off the TV? Will you slow down? Will you take some things out of your calendar?

And that's the question. What will you do to behold that love this week? We're talking about resolutions in Sunday school. What are you going to resolve?

[40 : 36] How are you going to resolve to say, this week I will behold the love of God. I will find some way of doing it. And then I ask you, will you rejoice in this love?

Will you rejoice in this love? Will you take it in? And will you drink it up? And will you be happy in it? And will you say thank you? And will your love, will that love excite you to love others?

Will that generous love to you excite generous love for your part? Remember Zacchaeus, on the day of his salvation, he stood up in front of everyone, in front of the group, a very rich man with a lot to lose, even in saying this, but he says, today I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I've cheated anyone out of anything, I will pay it back four times the amount.

What was going on in Zacchaeus' heart? Well, he's excited, he's reveling in Christ's love for him.

And now in the excitement of that, the death grip that Zacchaeus had on his stuff in his life, it broke open, and he started loving and sharing with others.

That's rejoicing in Christ's love. That's Zacchaeus so excited about Christ's love for him, he starts giving himself away. And so that is my question.

[42 : 15] How this week will you love? What resolution will you make in concrete, specific terms to say because God has so loved me and it's so good, I'm going to love my spouse in this way.

I'm going to do this for my husband. I will do this for my wife. I will do this for my children. I will do this for my fellow church member, for my brother and sister here at Grace Fellowship church. And so I want you to think of something concrete. Zacchaeus had two things that he was going to do. What are you going to do? Where will you let go of that grip on your life, on your time, and on your stuff, and on your heart, and with joy because God has so loved you, and God so loves you, then on the strength of that, and on those wings that you will say, I'm going to go and love them. So with that, we're going to end with me asking you, what resolutions will you make to do those two things, to behold that love, and then to go and share that love, and give love of your own? What will you do this week? Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, Son, Spirit, it is amazing that you have loved us so much with an infinite, boundless love, a love that we will explore for generations and ages and ages to come, and we will never, billions and billions of ages from now, come to an end of it.

[44 : 06] There will be no place or time where we'll draw the line and say, God only loves me this much, but we will say how vast, beyond all measure, and that he would love us despite of our sinfulness, despite of our weakness, despite of the pain and the sorrow and the ache and the unloveliness in our lives, that he would love us, and that love has an engine that's internal.

Thank you, God, that you love us like that. And there are some here who are blind and are still darkened and they don't see you as you are.

I pray that you would open their eyes and the way you did Zacchaeus and that you would set them free and shine upon them. Father, I pray for each one of us here that we would do something this week to behold God's love in a fresh way or a new way or the same way, but that we would insist and we would resolve to see it better or again.

And then I pray that you would help us to carry out a resolution to love those around us with more generosity and more openness, more joy than we have so far.

I ask these things for Jesus sake that he might have a people that are beautiful for him. Amen.
Amen.