

God is Love

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Preacher: Gabriel Wong

[0:00] Let's pray before we get into the word. Lord, we come before you and humble ourselves before you.

! We are ready to receive your word.! We thank you for it, that you chose to make yourself known, that the God which no one has ever seen has made himself known through Jesus Christ and to us when we love one another.

Lord, we pray that your spirit would show us more of your beauty to receive your love for us and for this to transform us and for us to love you even more and praise you even more for it.

Lord, may everything I say be your words and not my own. Speak through me, Lord. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. All right, good morning, church. So in the last few months, we've been going through 1 John.

And we've seen in this letter that John encourages us to know God and to love him. And to love him even more deeply.

[1:08] And he says, we saw this last week, that there is only one way to God, and that is through Jesus. That was the focus last week, that we're not all blind men touching different parts of the same elephant, but there really is only one way to God.

At the same time, knowing God and loving God is inseparable from following his commandments and loving others. John says that God is light and God is love.

And there's no darkness in God. So if we're walking in darkness and continuing in sin, then we really need to question whether we know God and abide in him who is light.

That's what we saw previous weeks in 1 John. And now recently, we've been talking more about love, that we must love one another. That means, at the bare minimum, that we shouldn't hate one another.

We shouldn't be like Cain, who murdered his brother. That's the bare minimum. You shouldn't murder your brother. But more than that, we should love. We should love like Jesus loved, who didn't murder, but who laid down his life, the righteous for the unrighteous.

[2:17] And that's the way we ought to love. We should lay down our lives for one another. Love has to cost something. That's what we heard. We can talk about love, but talk is cheap.

John says, let us not love in word or in talk, but in deed and in truth. So the question is, are we willing to love one another, even if it costs us? And now we're getting to part of the letter in 1 John, where John gives us a more extended treatment of love.

What is love itself? Where does love come from? And how are we able to love? And why should we love one another? This is what John talks about in chapter 4 now.

So let's read the passage together. We'll read John chapter 4, verses 7 to 12. Can we all stand as we read the word of God together? Yeah.

Thanks. 1 John chapter 4, verses 7 to 12. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

[3:30] Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. 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 loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us. This is the word of God. You can take a seat.

Beloved, let us love. That's how verse 7 begins, and that will be our focus for today. Beloved, people who are loved, let us love one another. Let us love one another, and first we do this because

love is a matter of identity.

That's how John thinks of it. We see this in verse 7. It says, Whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

[4:40] Loved is wrapped up in our identity as being children of God. Whoever loves, in other words, everybody who loves is born of God. And the way we act and feel in love is intertwined with who we are, our identity as children of God.

There's an interesting implication of verse 7. And we see this. Take, for example, people here have a Hong Kong ID card. Right?

You could say that if you have a permanent Hong Kong ID card, then you're a permanent resident. This is evidence of this. Right? But logically, you could also flip around this statement and say it the other way.

It's also true that only those who have, only those who are permanent residents have an ID card, a permanent ID card. Right? You can't get this ID card if you're not, if you don't have PR.

And the same thing is true here. We can flip around the statement logically and say that if everybody who loves is born of God, then it's also true that those who are not born of God do not love.

[5:47] Said another way, verse 7 means that only those who are born of God in fact love. That's the logical implication of it. And that's a pretty bold statement.

And that, I think, should make us raise the bar on what love even is. Because John here is making an exclusive claim on love. Not just on truth, but on love itself.

At least on a particular kind of love. That there is a love that only belongs to those who know God. And that's a bit puzzling to me because when I look around, people outside of the church that do not know Christ do love, as far as I can tell, and sometimes even appear to love more than those in the church.

See, I can see parents who truly love their children. I see people who give very generously, philanthropically, effective altruism. Or I hear of soldiers in wars who sacrifice themselves for their brothers.

That is love. Or Tony Stark, he takes one for the whole world at the end of Avengers. Right? So we've been talking about love the last weeks and challenging each other to show love to one another.

[6:59] For example, inviting people over for a meal or being more loving to our families. And that's great. That really is great. And we should continue doing that. We should continue loving one another.

But also, if we square up those things alone with verse 7 that says, everyone who loves has been born of God, I don't think that's quite enough. There must be something more to love that John's talking about.

Something deeper. Something that is shown in those things that we're talking about. But there's something more to this love. Because those who are not born of God, John says, some of the things we're talking about, those who are not born of God, can love in those ways.

So, what is this love that John is talking about? Because love to John is more than just goodwill or good vibes and good feelings. John is talking about a love that is perfected.

A perfect sort of love. Verse 12 says, if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. Or verse 18 later in the chapter says, perfect love cast out fear.

[8:09] This perfect love is the goal. That perfect love is what John's talking about. It's true that the world loves, but such love is always tainted by sin and is limited. It's easy to say that we love one another, but who can say that they really love perfectly?

naturally. Naturally, it's easy to love when love fulfills sexual desires or when people recognize our generosity and philanthropy or when this love is reciprocated and makes us feel good.

It's harder to love, though, when our friends show up for dinner an hour late or just cancel on us last minute. Or it's easy to love your boyfriend, girlfriend, fiancé, unless they're slow to respond to your messages or too busy for a date.

It's difficult enough sometimes to love those who are dear to us, but God calls us even higher, not just to love those who love us, but to love even our enemies.

Jesus says in his Sermon on the Mount, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that, again, identity is what's in view, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

[9:18] For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors or sinners do the same. And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others?

Do not even the Gentiles, in other words, those outside the church, do the same? They can also love in these ways. But Jesus goes on, you therefore must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

See, we are called to love to be perfect and to love perfectly. This is unconditional love that extends even to our enemies. And that's what John means when he says here, let us love.

That's the kind of love that's found in the children of God and that marks who are the children of God. Now, that's a pretty high standard. So, how can we do this?

How can we love in this way? Where does this love come from? Well, notice how verse 7 starts. It says, beloved, let us love. Beloved, loved ones, let us love one another.

[10:20] We can love in this way because love is from God and God is love. We can love because we are loved by the one who is love itself. Love is our identity because likewise, love is part of God's essential nature.

God is love. You can't take away, if you look at the sun, you can't take away heat and light from the sun. And in the same way, you can't remove love from God. He just radiates white hot love.

He shines with love. He is light. God's love existed from eternity in the trinity, the father loving the son and the son loving the father in perfect unity along with the spirit.

Each person of the trinity delighting in one another and glorifying one another, loving each other perfectly. And out of this passionate love, God created the world to share his goodness, to share this love with us.

He created us so that we would know him and love him and enjoy his love. But all of us turn from God and we rejected his love and chose to worship other things.

[11:23] That is sin. Sin fundamentally is a rejection of God. When Adam and Eve ate of the fruit in the garden, they believed that sin is better than what God promised them.

God promised them life and said, you will prosper, but they believed that God was hiding a good thing from them. When our hearts chase after money, it's because we don't believe that God provides for us.

When we sin, it's fundamentally because we don't believe that God provides for us and he's the one, he's the only one who can satisfy the cravings of our hearts. Sexual sin or making our desires our identity shows that we crave fulfillment in following our own way rather than delighting in God's perfect love for us.

or pride or desire for power is because we want to exalt ourselves, we want to raise up ourselves more than we want to worship God and recognize his love for us.

We sort of spit in God's face when we ignore his passionate love, all that he is, his white hot love for us, and instead use this life and breath that he gave us that was designed for relationship with him.

[12:38] But instead of that, we use that merely to worship and enjoy the things that he made. That's what sin is fundamentally. We rejected God, we wanted nothing to do with him.

Yet, God showed his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Jesus dying for us is the greatest revelation of God's love and of love generally.

That's what verse 9 says. It says, 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.

The consequence and punishment of our sin is death, but God sent his son, Jesus, into the world to save us. We were God's enemies, yet he still loved us. Verse 10 says, God loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.

His son, God's son, Jesus, came in the flesh. That's what we heard last week. God came in the flesh for us and Jesus lived a perfect life and died on the cross as a propitiation.

[13:46] In other words, an atoning sacrifice, a sacrifice for our sins. We needed a propitiation, we needed an atoning sacrifice because our sin deserved death and Jesus took the punishment that we deserved on the cross for our sins and died in our place so that we might live through him.

That's what verse 10 is saying. And Jesus didn't just die but he rose from the dead on the third day and just as Jesus rose from the dead, we also have new life and access to God if we believe in him. Jesus died and rose so that we might live through him. And that is perfect love. This is the love of God that is manifested to us. Jesus dying on the cross for us.

That is the main way where God reveals that he is loved and that he loves us. Verse 10 says, in this is love, not that we love God, not that we love God because we didn't love God, we didn't love him at all.

Very much the opposite. We could have been the ones who were chanting, protesting, a mob, crying out for Jesus to be crucified. We could have been those mocking Jesus as he went to the cross.

[14 : 55] But Jesus didn't get angry at them, he didn't snap back at them. He loved them. And in fact, their mocking, their rejection was exactly the reason why he was there in the first place.

Because in this is love, not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his son as the propitiation to die on the cross for our sins. As Jesus was being mocked and rejected, Jesus, what did he do?

He just continued bleeding out on the cross for those who were rejecting him and prayed even that God would accept his propitiation, his atoning sacrifice. He prayed for God, forgive them for they do not know what they're doing.

While we were his enemies, Jesus died for us. That's God's perfect love on display and that's the love that we're called to, to love perfectly, sacrificially, without limit, even loving those who hate us, who reject us, who mock us, who annoy us, who bother us.

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that Jesus died on the cross for our sins. And now, what does that mean to us? How do we respond? Well, verse 11 says, Beloved, if God so loved us, if he loved us in this way, we ought also to love one another.

[16 : 11] Okay, great. So let's do that this week. Let's go love. Let's love one another. We discussed this practically before asking, how can we love? In what ways can we love? We talked about this in our midweek groups.

Right? Inviting people over for dinner, loving your coworkers, being less annoyed with those who bother you. Let's go and do those things. Keep doing those things. Let's love one another.

We also ought to one another. But in addition to what, the what, in what ways can we love? I'd also like us to see a bit why and how we ought to love.

Verse 11 says, If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. And my question then is, how does God's love Jesus dying on the cross, how does God's love make us also ought to love?

Why does God's love mean that we also ought to love? Now there's two ways, there's at least two ways we can interpret this. Right? When John says we ought to love, you could interpret that to mean we ought to love because we're under an obligation, because we owe it.

[17 : 19] Right? Because we were in such a great debt to God in our sin, a huge debt that we can never pay back. There's nothing we could do, but God, he was merciful to us, he was gracious to us.

We talked about that previously. God cancelled our debt. He forgave us in Christ. And if God so loved us with such a great love, mercy, if he loved us in this way, then you could think we owe it to God to love others also.

Right? If Jesus died for us, then don't we owe our entire lives to him. He died for me so the least I could do, you could think, is smile more to others or stack the chairs after service.

I ought to. Is this what this means? I don't think so. Right? This is not how we're meant to love because if it is, then we're in huge trouble.

It would be bad news if this is how we ought to love. Because if we ought to love because we owe God something, because we're in, yeah, if we ought to love because we owe God something, then that means that we're still in debt.

[18 : 26] If we owe God something, that means that our debt hasn't been paid and our sins aren't forgiven. So this is not how we ought to love, not out of a debt, not because we owe something.

Right? Because Jesus is the propitiation for our sins. It is finished. And we don't honor God by trying to pay him back, by trying to pay back this debt that we owed. And we can't.

Right? If you were \$50 million in debt and God paid it all for you, Jesus paid it all for you, you can't pay him back by giving him a crumpled up \$20 bill out of your back pocket.

How silly would that be? But I think we do try to do this sometimes. We do try to earn, pay back God's love for us. You might think, okay, maybe not \$20, that's too little.

But I'll do better. I'll love more this week. I'll be nicer to that guy. I ought to. I'll give God back maybe \$50, \$100, do we find ourselves doing that sometimes?

[19:26] But we can't earn God's approval. We can't. That's fundamentally the wrong attitude. And we, if we try to love in this way, at some point, our tanks will run empty.

That's not how we're meant to love. If we're trying to love in this way, we will fall short. That's not how we ought to love. John is using the word ought in an encouraging way.

Remember that love is tied with our identity. We love because love is from God. And we are his children. God is love. It's his nature. Love is his nature. Love freely, freely radiates from him. And that also is true of his children. Just like how MJ didn't have hair. That's because James also didn't have hair. So in the same way, we are his children.

We are like him. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Right? So when John says that we ought to love, he means it in the same way that fish ought to swim or that birds ought to fly or that flowers ought to bloom or stars ought to shine or how Bonnie ought to laugh.

[20:34] And that's because it's in our nature. That's just what we do. Right? In the same way, God's children also ought to love. It's part of our nature and design.

And in doing so, that's how we find life and fulfillment and purpose. God's love changes us. Jesus didn't just die to forgive our sins.

His love changed us completely. In 2 Corinthians, Paul writes, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come.

See, God's love is so intense that when he loves us, he completely transforms us. We are made new. God is love. And if he himself, love himself, his spirit is dwelling within us, that means also that love must dwell within us.

God cannot dwell within us if love doesn't dwell in us, if God is love. Right? It's like how a fire can't abide in a can of gasoline without an explosion happening.

[21:39] So also, God can't abide in us also without love abiding in us because God is love. That's what verse 12 says. No one has ever seen God.

No one has seen God. But if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. His perfect love. We have this through Jesus when we love one another.

That is the way in which we ought to love. Not out of obligation, but freely because he changed us. Because if God so loved us, we are changed and when we love, his love is perfected in us.

That's why Jesus says that his yoke is easy and his burden is light. We ought to love freely, not out of obligation as a weight on our shoulders. But instead, he broke our chains.

He freed us so that loving becomes easy and light the more and more we do it. The more and more his spirit refines us and perfects us. God's command to love is not an obligation, a weight on our shoulders, but just a command to take hold of what Jesus has done for us.

[22:44] Love and become the children of God that you are, that Jesus' blood made you. And so this week as we love, let's try to remember God loved me and so I'm free to love.

It's not that I have to love because Jesus loved me and I also ought to do it. But no, Jesus loved me and I am his child. And God's children freely, generously, radiate love because God is love.

He changed me. I can love as he loves now, perfectly, his blood bought that for me. And maybe not perfectly now because we are still stained by sin. But one day when he returns, I know I'll love perfectly.

There'll be no more sin, no more tears. We'll be in the presence of God. We will see him, know him as he fully is, just as we're fully known. And in the meantime, let's press forward day by day to love ever more perfectly, to be the child of God that he called us to be and made us to be.

So again, beloved, people who are loved by God, let us love. Love is from God and he showed his love to us by sending his son to die for our sins.

[24:06] God's love gave us freedom to love and out of that freedom, we ought to love one another. Not out of obligation, but because his love has transformed us. Can we do that this week?

Let's pray for that. Father, we are so humbled.

We are so in awe. What is man that you're mindful of him? What is the son of man that you care for him? We are just little specks. More than that, little people who, out of everything that you've made, the wind obeys you, nature obeys you, the sun rises and falls at your command.

But we chose to use the life and breath that you gave us to curse you, dishonor your name, to mock you, reject you, the one who gave us life and breath.

But Lord, you are love. We praise you that you loved us and gave your son to die for us. Lord, may this love, may this truth sink deeper and deeper in our hearts.

[25:19] Spirit, make your love abide in us. And with that change us, help us, God, to love as you've called us to. An example of Jesus.

To lay down our lives, not just for those who love us, before our enemies even. And God, we know we can't do this on our own. I can't even love those who I love, who love me.

So Lord, we need you. We can't do this on our own. We can't pay back the debt that we owe. But Jesus paid it all and you've transformed us as your children to love perfectly, to be holy as you are holy.

You call us to this and you will finish the good work that you started in us. We look forward to seeing that day when we see the end of it. Thank you, Lord, for all this.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

[27:04] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.

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