

God's Love

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- [0 : 0 0] If you have a Bible, please would you turn to 1 John chapter 4, John's first letter.
- Over summer we took a break from Mark's gospel and we jumped back into Exodus. Now we're taking a break from Exodus just because last week, this week and next week are kind of stand alone with visiting people.
- So 1 John chapter 4. I'm going to read from verse 7 and actually down to 17.
- 1 John chapter 4 verse 7 says this.
- 1 John chapter 5.
- [1 : 4 7] 1 John chapter 5. 1 John chapter 5. 1 John chapter 5. 1 John chapter 5. 1 John chapter 6. 1 John chapter 6.
- 1 John chapter 6. so that Stephen can catch up on the thing. I'll start again, okay? From verse 7. Beloved, let us love one another, 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. 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.
- 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.
- [2 : 5 5] By this we know that we abide in him, and he in us, because he has given us his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world.
- Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us.
- God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is, so also are we in this world.
- Amen. This is God's word. And so we have this amazing statement, God is love.
- When we think about who God is, and what God is like, we can look to God's attributes. And when it comes to God's attributes, they are not merely qualities that God has, but they are the very essence of who God is, and what God is.
- [4 : 2 0] We talk about attributes of God. It is who and what God is, in his very essence. God is love. And when we think about that statement, I want to say two things before we explore in what ways.
- So first, this statement, God is love, this statement is not limiting. When John says God is love, he's not limiting God's essence to only one attribute above all the others.

He's simply reminding his readers that where you find God, you will inevitably find love, because that is the nature of God. Where you find God, you will find love.

And to John's original readers, there was a group of people in that church that John wrote to, there was a group of people who left them and were claiming to be the true children of God, and yet they had no love.

They hated other Christians. And so, John also says a few verses later, if anyone says, I love God, and hates his brother, he's a liar.

[5 : 32] For he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. So John's not limiting God by this statement, but he's just making a point about the inevitable connection between God and love.

And think about the great hymns through the ages. We are indebted to people like Charles Wesley for excellent hymns, but, and can it be, an amazing hymn?

An amazing hymn? Amazing love, how can it be? Yet there's a little unhelpful line in that song about the incarnation which says that God emptied himself of all but love.

That suggests that he emptied himself of all other essential divine attributes. Now I'm sure that's not what Charles Wesley meant, but he could have been more careful in writing that. God did not empty himself of all but love.

For if for a nanosecond Christ were not fully divine, the universe would cease to exist. And how can I say that if Christ lost any of his other attributes for a mere nanosecond, how can I say the universe would cease to exist?

[6 : 52] Because in Colossians 1 it says, in him all things hold together. just as it says in Hebrews 1 that he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

So we mustn't view this statement, God is love, as limiting God's nature. It's not limiting God's nature. There's no hierarchy in God's attributes. Love is not supreme over all the other attributes.

But God is who he is. And all of his attributes essential in nature, fully and completely, all at once and all of the time. All of God.

Every attribute is who he is all at once, all of the time. The second thing about this statement, God is love, is that this statement is not reversible.

We cannot say that love is God. John is saying something about the nature of God. God is. If it was reversed, he would be saying something about the nature of love.

[7 : 51] which is not true. It's neither John's point, nor is it theologically true, that love is God. John helps us avoid this in the previous verse when he tells us that love is from God.

Therefore, God is the source, not love. God is the source of all love. Not the other way around. God has no source. God is self-existent, self-sufficient, eternal, and infinite, the creator of all things.

God has no source. And God is not from anything, but love is from God. And so, to say something like love is God is to enthrone love, which is idolatry.

Yet think of the way our culture seeks to do that very thing. Not just to enthrone love, as though to appreciate the high call as creatures to love.

The way our culture seeks to enthrone love is not because it sees the true benefit of love, but it's rather because sinful people want to enthrone their sinful desires.

[9 : 02] That's what's going on in our culture. And you see that in this statement, which is very similar to John's statement, God is love. Have you ever heard of another statement in our culture that's very like that?

Love is love. Love is love. Let us enthrone love so that we can justify your sinful desires. Behind us, statement, is not a pure and selfless sacrificial ethos, but rather a justification for our feelings.

And so, let us ask the question, what is love anyway? What is love? Love? Some of you have got that reference. We need to be clear on what love is.

Whether we say God is love or whether we say love is love, we need to ask, what is love? What do you mean? And so, C.S. Lewis, for instance, famously highlighted the four common Greek terms for love.

The four loves, maybe some of you read C.S. Lewis, excellent author, excellent work on that. And he highlighted that in ancient Greek, there were four terms commonly used for love.

[10 : 12] So, the first term, storge, refers to affection. And affection is that which is to that which is familiar. Whether it's family, whether it's a pet, or whether it's your favorite chair.

Some of you are sitting on your favorite chair right now. And it's because it's familiar to you. Something familiar. C.S. Lewis says, storge is like the dog who wags its tail at a familiar person even if they've done them harm.

And it barks at a stranger even if they've not done them harm. That's affection. Eros, the second kind of love, eros refers to romance or sexual passion.

It's where we get the term erotic from. Philia refers to friendship which is like a kinship over common interest and a longing for camaraderie.

And finally, agape refers to benevolence or charity. And unlike the others, it is a love that is not dependent on familiarity.

[11 : 16] It's not dependent on feeling and it's not dependent on common interest. It is a love that is selfless and sacrificial. And while this term was used in ancient Greek, the way the Bible uses the term agape was actually quite novel and new.

It was higher and greater. And so Jesus and his followers began to give a greater meaning to the term agape.

It was a term that was used as the standard term to describe God's nature of love. And it thus became the standard of his children.

Christian love is to be modeled after Christ's love. If God is love, agape love, by nature, then surely his children, the children of God, are to love one another with agape just like the Son of God loved them.

So when we talk about love, is love just a feeling? No. Love is not just a feeling. And so people talk about falling in love.

[12 : 28] There's a lot of falling that goes on among us. And some of it might feel like falling in love. If love is just a feeling, something that we fall into, and we can't help who we fall in love with, then let me tell you what that sounds like.

It actually sounds like a love that is involuntary. something that just happens whether we like it or not. Now is that the way that you love your spouse?

Involuntary? Accidental? Unintentional? It doesn't sound like a love that I want. It also sounds like a love that is cheap, as though it completely unconsiders any thought of counting the cost.

there's no thought of commitment and falling in love. It sounds like a love that is selfish, because it is about indulging your desires to get what you want, which may feel nice, but it's not nice to the person that you've left behind, because you happen to fall in love with someone else.

And so it's a love that sounds involuntary and cheap and selfish. Is that what love is? No, that's not what love is. We could keep going, but we get the point. The term falling in love really means something else, to be attracted intensely to someone, to be passionate, to be drawn to someone, which happens.

[14 : 05] And while that can describe the beginning of a relationship, it's actually this term falling in love is unhelpful and insufficient to define what love really is. And so you'll be likely familiar with one of the greatest, most famous descriptions of love that you might have had at your own wedding or heard at another wedding.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13, love is patient and kind. Now one writer brilliantly said this, if people can fall in love, have you ever heard of anyone falling into patience?

No, I don't know anyone who falls into patience. Oh, I'm so patient, it just happened to me. I didn't mean it. No, that's not true. Neither is that true about love.

Love is patient and kind. Love doesn't envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist in its own way. It's not irritable or resentful.

It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but it rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

[15 : 15] Love never ends. love is not a love that I want. It's not a love that I want. Love is a word that is thrown about just to justify cheap thrills and selfish actions under the pretense of being involuntary.

It just happens. Love is a term that is used to justify cheap thrills and selfish actions in our culture. love is that love. It's not a love that I want.

And it's certainly not the love that comes from God. The love that comes from God is nothing like this. His love is selfless, not selfish. His love is generous, not self-gratifying.

His love is deliberate, not involuntary. His love is very, very costly, not cheap. His love is enduring, not fleeting.

And his love is faithful, not unfaithful. Consider this. If God is love by nature, then God's love is not in relation to anything that we do.

[16 : 27] For God has always been a God who is himself loved by nature since before we existed. If God is loved by nature, then it's not in response to anything that we do.

And so let me just say a few things, and we'll be quick going through this. Let me say a few things about God's love because of who God is. If God is loved by nature, then let us think about the nature of God and how that relates to love because all of God's attributes relate to one another.

So God's love is eternal. It doesn't wane over time. It doesn't fade or dim. There is no dip in his love and there's no chance of his love running out.

Since God is eternal, his love endures forever as we sang. He does not grow weary of loving you. Isn't that good news? God never grows weary of loving you.

Do you ever feel like he does? I feel like God should be weary of loving me. But he never grows weary of loving you. It is his nature.

[17 : 39] God is love and therefore it is the most natural thing for God to do, to love us. And since God himself has no beginning and no end, then neither does his love for his people suddenly begin or suddenly end.

As Jeremiah 31 3 says, I have loved you with an everlasting love. Therefore with loving kindness I have drawn you. And as it says in Ephesians 1, he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him and in love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ.

Yeah, he chose us in Christ and in love he predestined us. God's love is infinite. We have not even began to scratch the surface of God's infinite love nor could we ever get to the bottom or the edge of it.

Now think of the most intense form of love that a human can have. Whether it's in a marriage, whether it's a friend giving his life for another, or whether it's a parent that has intense love for their child.

Yet such love ebbs and flows. Our human love ebbs and flows. It is not so intense all the time and even if it were, because we are finite by nature, our love is finite.

[19 : 12] But because God is infinite, his love is infinite. And Paul says in Ephesians 3, as if this could ever be possible, Paul says that he prays for us to comprehend something of the breadth and length and height and depth.

Yet the love of Christ surpasses knowledge. It just surpasses knowledge. And so there is no scenario where a million years pass and we suddenly exhaust the love of God.

It is impossible because he is infinite. And friends, if you know about the nature of infinity, then it is like if love were an ocean which can fill us completely if we were in the ocean.

And yet the nature of infinity is. Love can fill you and yet it subtracts nothing from the love that is left over. That is the nature of infinity. You take some away, you don't actually take any away because it is infinite.

There is nothing that could be taken away from it. There is always infinitely more love in God that is left over than the love that he gives out.

[20 : 28] And yet he loves us infinitely. And that is why it says that he is abounding in steadfast love. A defining feature of God that he abounds in steadfast love.

God's love is unchanging. Just as God himself is immutable, unchanging, so too his love cannot change. If he has set his love upon you, he will not change his mind.

Is that not good news? There is nothing God is going to find out about you because he knows everything about you already. Past, present and future. And if God has set his love upon you, he is not going to change his mind.

He is going to love you eternally, infinitely, unchangingly. As James says, there is no shift in shadow with God and so neither will he shift in his love.

And neither will there be suddenly a dark shadow in his love. God is not capricious like us or like the other gods. He is not prone to mood swings.

[21 : 29] You can no more change the fact that God is infinite by nature as you can change the unchanging nature of God's love. You cannot change the unchanging nature of God's love.

One boss that I used to work for used to say to me that you cannot earn your way into God's love, neither can you sin your way out of his love. God's love cannot be changed.

God's love is faithful. Unlike human love, which can often be fickle and unfaithful, God cannot be unfaithful and neither can his love.

It is called his loyal love, his steadfast love, a love that is relentless and resolute, faithful even when we are not. Psalm 117, I'd recommend you read it.

It's only a couple of lines. It says, praise the Lord, all nations, extol him, all peoples, for great is his steadfast love towards us and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.

[22 : 29] Praise the Lord. God's love is uninfluenced. Since God is loved by nature, his love is not prompted by anything in us, for he has always been love from everlasting to everlasting.

His love for us is not because of anything that we have done or some quality in us. As A.W. Pink says, there was nothing in the creature to attract or prompt God's love.

Deuteronomy 7 says, it was not because you were more in number than all the other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of peoples.

But it is because the Lord loves you and is faithful to his promise. God does not love a person because they are deserving of love or because they love him or because they are particularly lovable.

And if we do happen to love God, as 1 John 4:19 says, we love because he first loved us.

[23 : 36] And we know that God's love is uninfluenced because of the way his love was demonstrated. As it says in Romans 5:8, we read it earlier, God shows his love for us and that while we were still sinners, unlovable, undeserving, Christ died for us.

He showed his love for us in that way. God's love is just. He doesn't owe us love. God does not owe us anything.

And we don't deserve his love in the first place. And so, how can God love sinners like us? How is it possible when God doesn't owe us anything and we're not particularly lovable and we don't deserve it?

Well, it says this in Romans chapter 3. It says, There is no distinction among people for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ.

Whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the former sins.

[24 : 57] It was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

God's love is just. There's no injustice in God's love. He is just to love a sinner because the sinner has been punished in Christ.

All of his sins have been paid for in Christ on the cross and so God remains just but he is also the justifier of those who have faith in Christ and therefore can receive the love of God.

And finally, finally and ultimately God's love is in Christ. This is perhaps the most important of all the truths about God's love.

Because he's not only revealed his love to the whole of the world in Christ but his love for us cannot be separated from Christ. God's love for the world that he demonstrated in Christ cannot be separated from Christ.

[26 : 05] Just as it says in 1 John 5, God gave us eternal life and this life is in his son. So too God's love for us is in his son.

And Jesus said this in his prayer in John 17. Jesus prayed for you and I when he said I do not ask for these only but also for those who will believe in me through their word.

That's you and me. That they may all be one. Just as you, Father, are in me and I in you. That they also may be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me and loved them as you have loved me.

Think about that statement that God has loved us the same way that he has loved his very own son Jesus. Not only was Christ perfectly obedient, perfectly righteous and always listened to his father and always did the will of his father.

He was the beloved son in whom God was well pleased. Not only that, but Jesus is the divine son of God from all eternity. The one who was with the father in glory before the world existed.

[27 : 20] And so think about how God loves his son. Think about how a parent loves their own child a million times more than any other child on the playground.

And then think about how God would love his very own son who is perfect and blameless and excellent in a million ways.

Consider the gulf between us and Jesus. Not just in his earthly life, but in his eternal existence with God the father. What a gulf there is between us and Christ.

In respect to how lovely and how obedient and how amazing. How should the father love us with the same love that he loved the son?

How can it be that God could ever love us with the same love that he loves his own son? The simple answer is that his love for us actually is his love for his son.

[28 : 30] And so there, if we are in Christ, we receive the love of God for Christ his son by virtue of being in Christ. And so he loves us with the same love that he loves his son.

God's love is in his son and therefore if we are in his son, we receive all the love that God has for his son by virtue of being connected with his son.

We are undeserving. We are sinners by nature. We aren't as lovely as we think we are, but oh, how God loves us and shows us his love for us in Christ.

That is why it can be that although God's love is uninfluenced, his love is eternal and infinite and unchanging and so on, people can actually forfeit the experience and reality of God's love by rejecting his son in whom all of the love of God resides.

Because you might ask yourself, if God is love and his love is eternal and infinite and unchanging and so on and uninfluenced, then how come everyone in the world does not experience his love?

[29 : 47] It is because all of his love resides in his son. If you have the son, you have his love. If you do not have the son, you reject his love.

As our passage 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.

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. God's love was made manifest in Christ coming into the world and we can only live through him.

For he loved us and sent his son to remove the charge of death and judgment for our sins so that we can live through him and know his love forever.

And so folks, if you have tasted even a drop of the love of God in Christ, we've only begun to get a sense of the incredible wonder and excellence and the unimaginable reality of living in the infinite love of God.

[30 : 58] think about that for a moment. What would it be like to live in the infinite love of God? We've not even begun to scratch the surface of it.

What a great God it is. What an unimaginable life to be in Christ and to know this infinite, eternal, majestic love of God.

So let me pray. As Paul says in Ephesians 3, for this reason, I bow my knees before the father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory, he may grant to you to be strengthened with power through his spirit and your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you being rooted and grounded in love may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

And now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we can ask or imagine, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever.

Amen. Amen. Now let us sing together.