

The Proof of God's Love

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[0 : 0 0] Now let's turn to 1 John chapter 4. 1 John chapter 4 and for a little time this evening we'll consider 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. 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.

That's very obvious as you read through this letter of John, a letter that was written against heresy and against heretics, and against people who were trying to entice more out of the church of John's time than had already left it.

[1 : 1 6] John combats that by this great letter. It's not a very long letter. It's a very powerful letter. And it's very obvious as you read through it that one of the most important things, if not the most important thing for John in the relationship that Christians have to each other, is that they show and exercise love.

A few times through the epistle, he uses that as one of the tests as to genuine Christianity, whether or not we love one another. And the question arises, what is the most compelling reason as to why Christians should love one another?

John provides a number of reasons or a number of compelling arguments in favor of that. You could say, for example, chapter 3, verses 14 and 15, where he says there by this, he says, We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers.

We love our fellow Christians. Of course, when he's using the word brothers, as the custom was of the time, it includes sisters as well. It's male and female, all who are Christians. And that's included in all the uses of the word brother, of course, throughout the Bible, in this kind of context.

So he's really saying this is how we know we've passed out of death into life. In other words, we have evidence of the fact that we've come to be saved, that we've come out of death into life, because we love the brothers.

[2 : 5 2] We love our fellow Christians. It's an evidence. It's a compelling argument in favor of loving one another, that we get assurance from it. That's one thing that we get assurance from, that we have indeed come to know Christ and God properly.

Or you could go further on in chapter 4 itself, and it accords with what you find in chapter 2 as well. We're in chapter 4 near the end of the passage there.

Whoever does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, whoever loves God must also love his brother.

In other words, not only is he saying love for one another is itself an evidence of where we are spiritually in relation to God, but it's also something commanded by God.

God commands his people to love one another. Here he is saying this commandment we have from God, from him, whoever loves God must love, also love his brother.

[3 : 5 7] So a compelling reason why we have to love one another is that God requires it of us. God has commanded it of us. It's a powerful reason in itself.

But even that is not the highest and most compelling reason. Because the most compelling reason of all is the one in the passage before us tonight.

And it's in the fact that God is love and already has loved his people. The fact that he is love is the most compelling reason in the way that love has been shown and manifested.

This is how it has been manifested. That that love he sent his son into the world so that we might live through him. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

In other words, he's saying, yes, love is commanded and love is itself an evidence of having been born again or passing from death to life. But love and loving one another is something that we're compelled to do by the fact that God has loved us previously, has loved us prior to that.

[5 : 12] That he has shown his love to us, especially in what has happened in Jesus Christ. This is love, not that we loved God. That's not the definition of love as far as John is concerned.

That's not the compelling reason why we should love one another. This is love in that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.

John is really saying in that that because this is the case, it is the most compelling reason you have tonight to love your fellow Christians and I have to love my fellow Christians.

Because of what I know and see in the love of God. Because what God himself as love has done in loving us to the extent that he has in sending a son to die on the cross for us.

That's really essentially the argument of the passage. And more particularly within that, there are three reasons or aspects of that compelling argument.

[6 : 18] There are three aspects of it that we can briefly go over just as we see more of the passage. First of all, it's from the fact that God is love. Here's the first compelling argument, the first part of the argument, that God in fact is love.

We're dealing with facts. It's important when you come to the Bible that when you look at things that the Bible says, historical events, but particularly those things that underlie our salvation.

The death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the coming of the Holy Spirit, the work of the Holy Spirit. These are facts. They're not theories. They're not inventions of the church.

They're not things that have been accumulated over generations that came into the formation that you now find in the New Testament. These are things that God is saying to us are historically, accurately the case.

And what he's saying is, this is the first thing, that God is love. Let's look at that one first. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

[7 : 28] Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. Now, there are two things there. He's saying God is the source of love. Love is from God. And so it follows that anyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

You see, there's the element of assurance there as well. Love is from God. God is the source of Christian love. It's not something that we've invented or created ourselves.

It's not something that just happens to have fallen into place because our life has taken on a different perspective or dimension. Love is from God. He is the creator of love.

When he comes to change your life, he plants there the principle of love. Whatever love you and I have had beforehand, and there is such a thing as common human love, of course there is.

But this Christian love, this love for God and love for God's people, is something that comes from the work of God in your heart. He is the source of love. And he's the source of this love in particular.

[8 : 29] And so it follows, John is saying, whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

You can see the logic of that. If love is from God and we are actually engaged and exercised in love, in loving one another, then that means we know God.

And we've been born of God. You see, he's saying that whoever actually does not, whoever says that he knows or she knows God and doesn't love, is actually living a lie.

As he says later in the passage too, as we'll see when we come to it. So love is from God, but he doesn't leave it at that, because he says anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

God is love. You know, it's quite strange in some ways that the shorter catechism that we value so much, when it asks the question, what is God?

It does not include that God is love. That's rather strange. You might want to ask the guys at the front here what their opinion of that is.

[9 : 39] It's something to study further. Why was that, perhaps? I don't know the answer to that myself. But it's strange that they left it out, because the Bible is so definite about the fact that God is love.

And that's so important. It's not something that simply belongs to what God does. It's not saying God is loving, although that's true.

If it were saying God is loving, it would mean that God exercises love. God shows acts of love. We'll see that in a moment too. But what it says is God is love.

Love. Wherever God is loving, wherever God has exercised his love, wherever he's shown his love, it comes from the fact that he is love. In order to be loving, he is himself love.

In other words, what it's saying is that love belongs essentially to the being of God. It's not something that he does, among many other things that he does.

[10:39] It's something that he is. He is love. That itself is difficult to comprehend the full impact of that.

But that's what we find. Look at verse 8 and verse 16, where it's repeated. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. Verse 16, so we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us.

God is love. Again, he repeats it there. Just to press the point home, what he's saying is this is an essential aspect of God's being.

And so it follows that anyone who does not love does not know God. If we're saying we're Christians and we don't love one another.

There are times when that's difficult. There are always challenges to that. But if that's our claim and if that's our constant claim that we are Christians, but we're constantly not loving one another as we ought, then we're living a lie.

[11:43] Why? Because what he's telling us here is that God is love. Anyone who does not love does not know God. And the whole thing hangs together on this wonderful aspect of God being love.

Now we're not going to go into that this evening. It's important that he's talking about the being of God. God has always been love. Even before God created anything, God was love.

He was always love. There never was any moment when God was not love. Before the existence of time, we mentioned time this morning.

Before time was created as part of the workings of the creation. God is love. Always has been the case. Within the depths of God himself, between the Father and the Son and the Spirit, love eternally characterizes his being.

It really helps us to just appreciate as much as we can or as little as we can the immensity of God. Because when we're talking about love, we're talking about perfect love in God.

[12:57] There's never anything to deflect him from it. There's never any corruption of it. There's never anything in him the opposite of that love as there is in us. He is love.

He is perfect beauty in eternal love. And you know that itself should just make us stop and think about God and just admire this as far as we're able to.

In our minds that pure and perfect love exists. And it's in God. And when you ask, what is love? You don't go to human love first and foremost.

When you ask, what is love? You don't go to people's ideas of love. You don't go to philosophers for their descriptions of love. You'll find it there. You go to God. You go to the Bible. You go to what the Bible tells you about God and how God has manifested.

We'll see his love. So that's the first thing. The fact that God is love is itself something that underlies why we must love one another. But secondly, the fact that God has loved us in verses 9 to 11.

[14:03] That's again the second aspect of this compelling reason. 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.

And in verse 10 as well through to verse 11. His love was made manifest. Some of John's favorite words. Making manifest.

Opening up. Making clear. Just showing things as they are. Well, he's saying God's love was made manifest. God has actually opened up his love to view.

He has put it in such a way that we can see it and see it in action. Where do you see the love of God? Where has he made it manifest? Where has it been made plain? Well, in this, that he sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him.

Where do you see the love of God most plainly? You see it in this, that he sent his only son into the world. That he sent his son, Jesus Christ, whom we know as Jesus.

[15:07] The son of God. Taking our nature to himself. Becoming human. Living that life that's described in the Gospels. That's where the love of God was made manifest.

Now, in passing. And we're just dealing with it in passing. But, of course, it means you need to study it a lot more than just in passing. And the point is this. That when it says that God sent his son, an only son, into the world.

It actually means you ask the question, well, who is that? Who is this son? How does he compare with God who sent him into the world? Why does it say God sent him into the world?

Is he not God as well, the son? Yes, he is. You need to take together all the things that you find taught in the Bible. With regard to the Trinity that God is.

The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. Some people will accuse you of just not really being true to the Bible. When you believe in God in three persons.

[16:09] But one God. They'll ask you, they'll challenge you. Well, where do you find a verse in the Bible that says God is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? Well, you don't. Not just out and out like that.

But like many other things in the Bible, you take its complete witness and testimony to God and what God is saying about himself. And when you put it all together and you see that this God is, in fact, God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

The one God in three persons and the mystery of his being. Then you realize that our salvation is a Trinitarian salvation.

It's important. That we believe in the Trinity. You can't understand your salvation unless you believe that God is the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

Because you read here that God the Father sent the Son into the world. And you read elsewhere that the Spirit takes the things of Christ and shows them unto us. Makes them plain to us.

[17:09] So our Trinitarian religion, our Trinitarian Christian faith is so, so important for our understanding of what that salvation is. And I pointed out to my own congregation in Stornoway recently that there have been, at least, I haven't checked just in the last few weeks, but there are meetings taking place in Stornoway by a group calling themselves the Christian Redefinition, I think it is.

I can't remember the word just now. It's Christian redefine or redefining Christianity. But one of the things that's presented there is that the Trinity is not a biblical doctrine. You see, that's heresy. And this is actually attracting folks or trying to attract folks away from solid biblical teaching. That's what John was doing.

That's why John wrote his letter. That's why we need to be aware in our day that these heresies still exist. And they exist because the person, the being that wants you to actually leave what you believe in for something else, is still active in the world.

The Antichrist, as John says, has come. The devil is busy using his agents, human agents, as heretics to take people away from the truth of Christ.

[18:33] Watch yourselves. Be careful. Don't believe everything you hear just because it has a religious tag on it or a Christian tag on it or a Reformed tag on it. Test it by the Bible.

Go to 1 John 4, the first few verses, where he says, Test the spirits to see whether they are from God.

Don't believe every spirit, he's saying. For many false prophets have gone out into the world. I don't want to get carried away into that, but there's a very obvious current relevance to a passage such as this.

That's the kind of thing you're facing in the world in which your Christian witness is set. So he's saying this is how God has actually manifested his love to us.

He sent his son into the world. But we need to break that down a little bit more just to see how John is emphasizing this really is the greatest love in existence.

[19:31] The love of God in Christ for sinners like you and I. How do you see it in terms of what John's saying in the passage?

Well, you can actually ask three questions. Who was sent? Why was he sent? And for whom was he sent?

God sent his son into the world. Who was sent? Well, it says he sent his one, his only son. Now, there are different ways in the passage where the son is described.

Verse 9 there describes him as the only son, his only son. Verse 10 is just his son. You go forward to verse 14 and literally, although it's not in the translation, it's literally the son, should be rather than his son, testify that the father sent the son to be the savior of the world.

So he's the only son. He is his son. He's the son. Already said that he is himself the second person. The Godhead is God. But the force of the argument, you see, is that he sent this person.

[20 : 48] It wasn't an angel. It wasn't a superhuman. It wasn't someone God created specially for the purpose less than himself. He sent his only son.

Now, the old translation there has his only begotten son. You find it back again in John's gospel. And the meaning of the word really means he's the son. The only one of his kind, you could say, is what it means.

Because while there are many other sons that God has, he makes us into his sons by adoption. He brings us into forming his family. That's through the act of adoption.

It's an act of his grace. It's something that's created for us by God. But he didn't create the sonship of his son. It's always been the case. That he is the only son in this respect.

No other son has the sonship of Christ. Has the same sonship as he has. Because he's God. And he's the second person.

[21 : 53] You see, that's what lends weight to the argument. That's what really makes the argument so compelling. That we should love one another because he sent his only begotten.

He sent this person, not someone less than this, into the world. And he sent him to be the propitiation, as we'll see, why he was sent.

That's the greatest love. That's the force of the argument in verse 11. Beloved, if God so loved us.

You know, when you're reading your Bible, you always have to pause over the smallest words.

Because we tend to actually stop over these big words like propitiation. And that's fine. And that's important. But don't miss the little words. Because if you take the word so out of that verse, it makes a big difference.

Beloved, if God loved us. That's what you would have then. That's powerful. But it's additionally powerful when it says, beloved, if God so loved us.

[22 : 58] If he loved us in this particular way. And to this extent that he sent his only son into the world. You see how that adds to the argument. How can we not love one another if this is the case?

And seeing this is the case. And seeing God has manifested his love. And opened up his love to view in that he sent his only son. If God so loved us.

Then he says, we ought also to love one another. And I think he's saying from that. If God so loved us. Then in like manner we ought to love one another.

See the argument follows into that part of the verse as well. He's saying God so loved us to that extent. Nothing was too much for him. He sent his only begotten. He sent his one and only.

In other words, that's saying to us. Nothing should be too much for us either. Then. In loving one another. We can't say.

[24 : 00] Oh, I can love to a certain extent. But that's going too far for me. To love such and such a person. Look what they've done. Look what they're like. Look what they've said to me. Look what they've done to me. God didn't use any argument like that.

God didn't say. I can't possibly send my only eternal son into this world. To die for sinners. The kind of people that they are. If God so loved us.

Then we are to love one another. We ought to love one another. In other words. You cannot really love Christ. Or if you take the words in Hebrews.

Let us go forth to him. Outside of the camp. Bearing his reproach. Chapter 13 of Hebrews. If you go out there. In your practice.

In your spiritual practice. Or in your mind. As a Christian. You stand there at the cross. You go outside of the city. Where Jesus was crucified. To the place of the curse. You look up at the cross.

[24 : 59] You see Jesus hanging on the cross. You just stand. And look. And think. What it is you're seeing. You cannot turn away from that.

If you're really taking account of it. And go on to live a selfish life. It constrains you love. That God so loved.

To that extent. That he sent his only son. That's who was sent. Why was he sent secondly? He was sent. To die.

He was sent. To die. He sent his son. To be the propitiation. For our sins. Now there's a big theological word. As you know.

I'm not going to go into it. Indeed. It's not. It's not John's purpose. At that point. To open up. The atonement. And what this word means. In the atonement. It means.

[26 : 01] It can mean both. The covering of our sins. But also. To propitiate God. And his wrath. Which is what the cross of Christ. The death of Christ. Did. That's not his purpose though.

His purpose is to show. That God's love. Went to this extent. Not only to send his son. Into the world. But to send his son. Into the world. To be the propitiation.

For our sins. Wouldn't you have thought. It would be enough. For God. To send his son. To take human nature. To himself. To become a servant.

To become obedient. To the father's will. To suffer. As described. In the gospels. Wouldn't you have thought. Surely. That's enough. For God's son.

Surely. Surely. God. The father. Doesn't intend. That his son. By taking our nature. Will actually go as far. As to give himself. To death.

[27 : 00] And not just to death. Physically. But to the death. That is damnation. The curse of God. Well. That's why he sent him. That's why he sent him.

Nothing short of that. And that's what's so powerful. About this compelling argument of John.

That we ought to love one another. He sent him. Out of love. For sinners. But he sent him to die. He sent him to bear our sins.

To pay the penalty of our sins. To die the death we deserve. To die. For our sins. And so this is really.

God manifesting his love. You see there's something in that. So important. In our understanding of love. Because love is really. Ultimately the giving of yourself.

[28 : 05] Doesn't matter what gifts you give. In your love. To someone you love. And there's nothing wrong with that. And it shows your love. And it manifests your love. And it makes your love visible. But the biggest requirement.

And the very heart of love. Is the giving of yourself. That's why it's so crucial. Even in the marriage relationship. Just to take one instance.

That is patterned upon the love of Christ. For his people. The love of the husband. The love of the wife for her husband. The love of the church for Christ.

It's a self-giving love. Jesus came to die. And in dying he gave himself. That's the crucial thing about God's love.

He gave his son. To the death of the cross. It's the sacrifice. It's the sacrifice. That looks to the good of others.

[29 : 03] By the giving of yourself. Now you take that into. The exercise of your love. And my love. As we have to. And it shows.

What a challenge. This compelling argument is. You need the grace of God for it. You need God's help to fulfill it. You need every day to pray.

That God will enable you. To love your fellow Christians. Because it's patterned on the love of God himself. And it includes at the heart of it.

The giving of yourself to the person. In self-sacrifice. In order to do good to the person you're loving. You give of yourself.

Of your time. Of your talents. Of your goods. Whatever it is you have to give. That's required of you in love. And that. Is much more difficult to do.

[30 : 00] Than it is to speak about. Because it's patterned on. The love of God giving. His son. Who was sent? His only beloved. His beloved begotten son.

Who. Why was he sent? He was sent. To die. To be the propitiation for our sins. For whom was he sent? Well in this passage. John is using. These prepositions.

We. Our. Us. Who does he mean? He means sinful. Undeserving. Hell deserving.

Human beings. At the heart of that rescue. Is God sending his son. Into the world. Now why did he send. His son for the likes of you and I.

Let's not try and. Dress ourselves up. As if we're better than the Bible. Says we are. We're despicable sinners. We're enemies of God. We've flouted his authority.

[31 : 02] We cast off. His rights over us. We're engaged in warfare against him. Within our souls. Our minds are closed to his truth. Until he changes us.

So many aspects of. What we are as sinners. That the Bible tells us. That we. Ourselves are reluctant to accept. That that's really what we are. But that's what we are. And that's what God loved. God. When he loved the world. To the extent of sending his only son. And it wasn't because he saw us as lovable. It's not because we were lovable people. It's not because we were. In some way attracting his love toward us. Because of something. Lovable in ourselves. It wasn't because we were lovable. But because he is love. That's why he loved us. [32 : 01] That's why he sent his son. Nothing less than that. Because of who God is. And what he's like. Who was sent. Why was he sent. For whom was he sent. In all of that. God's love. Is made manifest. To us. It's been opened up. It's been revealed to us. In all of that. The fact that God is love. The fact that God. Has loved us. And the third part. Is the fact that God's love. Is shown. In our love for one another. Indeed more than that. The fact that God himself. And what he's like. Is shown in our love. Look at what you find here in verse 12. It's a very interesting verse. And a verse that's really. An amazing argument in itself. No one has ever seen God. [32 : 59] If we love one another. God abides in us. And his love is perfected in us. Now if you know the writings of John. As I'm sure you do. That reminds you of. The beginnings of John's gospel. Because in John's gospel. In chapter one. Not at the very beginning. But not far into the chapter. You find virtually the same language used. As he's using here. In John chapter one. And verse 18. That's a verse that I often. Refer to in preaching. But it's such a wonderful verse. He's saying. No one has seen. Has ever seen God. The only God. Or the only begotten God. Different translations of that. It's the same person. It's Jesus. It's the son of God. He means. No one has ever seen God. The only begotten God. Who is in the father's side. At the father's side. Or the old translation. I think is better there as well. Who is in the father's bosom. In the very heart. [33 : 58] Of the father. They are that close. Eternally. He. Has made him known. See the same thing is being said. How can you actually. Love God. Whom you don't see. And where do you see. Anything of God. That enables you. Or constrains you. To love him. You see it in Jesus. And who is Jesus. He is the son. That God sent into the world. And by his coming. God has been. Made clear to us. See that's why he's saying. No one has seen him. At any time. But this person. He has made him known. And it's an interesting word. There as well. Made him known. Because it means really. What we are. Hopefully trained. To do. In. The training we have. For. For preaching the gospel. It's a word. Which. Literally is. [34 : 55] Exegesis. We're trained to do. Exegesis. Which means. Taking out of. The scripture. The teaching that's there. Not adding anything to it. But what's there. Trying to take it out. To exegete. To bring it out. And make it clear. See that's what he's saying about. Jesus. Making clear. The heart of God. It's interesting. He says there. The only begotten one. The only son. Who is in the bosom of the father. In the heart of the father. At the father's side. Whatever you. Translate it as. What he's really saying is. What is in the father's heart. Has been opened out. To our view. By the coming of the son. By Jesus. By the son of God. God. And now that language. Is used in 1st John 4. No one has ever. Seen God. Except this time. He's not saying. [35 : 53] Jesus. Has come to open up. What God is like. He's saying. If we love one another. God abides in us. And his love. Is perfected in us. In other words. What he's saying is. When we love one another. God is made visible. Through that. Because we're loving one another. In the manner in which.

God loved us. At least as far as possible. And that reveals. God as love. I can't explain. How that is. How that impacts. Upon those who see us.

As Christians. But this is what John is saying. That's why it's so important. That we do. Love one another. In a way that we're. Compelled here.

And. It's interesting. That he uses this. This phrase. If we love one another. God's love. Is perfected in us. That's a word.

[36 : 49] That again. Literally means. Brought to completion. Made complete. Brought to a fullness. Now. That's a remarkable thing. To say about the love of God.

You might say. Surely God's love. Has been made complete. Has reached its full. Achievement. In the cross of Christ. Christ. But no. That's not what he's saying.

There's something. That follows on from that. Something. The cross of Christ. Is itself a means of. Of reaching. And of producing.

What is that? It's Christian love. Christian love. The love of God. Reaches its full achievement.

In the love of Christians. For one another. His love. Is perfected. In us. The cross. Goes towards.

[37 : 48] The achieving of that. Without minimizing. In any way. What the cross is. In the father's view. But you cannot. Divide up. The love of God. And say. It ends at the cross.

And everything else. Is just a benefit to us. No. He's saying. Take the whole. Of God's love. As revealed to us. In the scriptures. And you can see it.

Coming into its own. And coming to its full achievement. When God's people. Love each other. What a remarkable thing. That is. We are denying.

The world. A view. Of God. And of the love of God. If we fail to love. One another. It's as important. As that. As love. Is made complete. Is perfected in us. If we love. One another. So tonight.

[38 : 49] What does Jesus mean to you? Is Jesus to you. Where you see. The love of God. Most clearly. Have you embraced.

This great gift. Of love. Because there's no other gift. Like it. Whatever has been. In your life. And in your life. And mine.

There will be things. That we wouldn't have. Wanted to know. In it. That we wouldn't have. Brought upon ourselves. There are things. That we wouldn't have chosen.

To experience. There are pains. And sorrows. And losses. And unexpected things.

That none of us. Would have chosen. But as we said. This morning. Everything. Is within. God's perfect time. And perfect plan. From his perspective.

[39 : 46] That's what we need. To try and. Keep hold of. But nothing. Is more remarkable. More awe inspiring. More humbling.

For us. Than to realize. The quality. Of the love of God. For the likes. Of you and I. And when we come.

To see that. And to realize. The extent. To which God. Has loved his people. Then hopefully. Hopefully I. And you can see. How.

Can I not love God. But also. How can I not love. My fellow Christians. Let's pray.