

Obligation to Love

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[0:00] Beloved, let us love one another. for love is from God.

and whoever loves has been born of God! and knows God. Let us pray. Lord, we thank you that you are indeed love.

And we thank you that you've supremely showed your love towards us in the person of your Son, Jesus Christ. Now we pray that in love you will open our hearts and hear us to hear your word this morning.

Give us hear us to hear. Give us hearts that will conform to the teaching of your word, that will attune our minds and will and actions to you, Lord.

And help us to live here, leave here this morning not only refreshed by your word, but encouraged and comforted by it. we pray in Jesus' name.

[1:01] Amen. So in those short verses that we just read, verse 7 to 12, John used the word love 14 times.

14 times. So I think we all have an idea what the main scope of his message in these verses are. John is now continuing in these verses his exhortation on love in verses 7 to 12.

Remember that he has been telling us so far in this epistle that our display of love is the sign that we belong to God.

In chapter 2 he says to us that the one who loves his brother abides in God's light. Again, he says in chapter 3 that the evidence that you are children of God is that you love your brothers and sisters in the family of God.

It is Christ's command to us and it marks those who are born of the Spirit, this love. And in the beginning of chapter 4 that we covered last week, John asked us to exercise discernment to test every spirit because not every spirit that uses the Lord's name is of God.

[2:29] So John invites us to test every spirit. Many spirits will claim to love and to belong to God but they are in fact of the world and not of God.

So the danger of our day is that the word love is thrown around so easily and it's often used to cover sin as a cover-up for sin.

For example, liberal churches condone the accommodation of sinful behaviors under the umbrella of love. The slogan, God is love.

That is the slogan of the Episcopal Church. It is a slogan of the world itself and it's used to mean that we cannot condemn sin.

God is love. And it's also what our John characterizes God in verse 8. Look at the end of verse 8 there.

[3:34] The sentence has been God is love. But unfortunately, that sentence and that statement has been used by the devil often to sow error and falsehood in the church.

The 1960s slogan, free love. I wasn't alive then but I'm well aware of it. Free love. And what does it mean, really? It's the definition of, it's the world's definition of what love is supposed to look like.

It basically means freedom to do as you feel, as you please, as long as you have the feeling of love burning within you.

To the world, love is a feeling. And that means that love is a slave to your emotions.

And that's not to say that love, true love, as described there, is devoid of feelings. But it is to say that love, agape love, is not driven primarily by our emotions.

[4:47] Rather, our emotions flow from love. This is, by the way, a good and practical metric in seeing through our culture's idea of love.

When someone tells you God is love, ask yourself, is their definition of love, is love a servant of my will?

Or is love the slave of my emotions? If love is a slave of my emotions, then it's my emotions that drive it. So whatever I feel, as long as I couch it under the umbrella of love, it's permissible. But that's not how the Bible describes love. That's not the biblical definition of love. John says God is love. And although it's not a controversial statement, you will find that if you let the Bible define what that means for you, that then you will be in sharp contrast and in sharp opposition to how the world sees it.

And you will find that the world actually hates the Bible's definition of love. So let's look. Let's look in these verses to see what John has to say about love.

[6 : 12] in verse 7, there's the exhortation again to love one another. Beloved, let us love one another for love is from God.

John returns again to this call. Love one another. Why? He grounds that command to love one another in who God is.

Love one another for love is from God. And then he goes on in verse 7, whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

And anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love. It's this assertion by Apostle John that those who practice love indeed know God while those who do not practice love have no knowledge of God.

John is telling us here, because we are children of God, because we are children of God, therefore we exhibit the family trait.

[7 : 29] Love is a key attribute of God your Father. So when you love, you are indeed like your Father.

You show that indeed you do know God. And the opposite is true. When you do not love, you are showing that you do not indeed have any knowledge of God as a Father.

You cannot claim any relationship with Him if you cannot love or do not love your fellow brother or sister. But the question is, again, what is love?

How do we truly know what love is? Because everyone claims to love in the world. And I think John gets the heart of it in verse 9 to 11 by giving us the demonstration of God's love to us.

love. And he says there in verse 9, in this 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.

[8 : 45] John gets to the heart of his argument there in verse 9 and 10. And he answers the question, what is love? How do we define it? How do we recognize it?

Notice here that John's definition is not that we need to look inside of ourselves. That's not what John is pointing to. He's not saying look into your feelings, check what your heart is telling you. That's not what John is inviting us to do. Rather, he says, do you want to know what love is? Do you want to know what it looks like? Do you want to know how to recognize true love? Look outside of yourself.

He points to history. He points to a person and ultimately he points to an event. And he says to us, yes, God is love and God is like Jesus.

You want to know what love is? Look to Jesus. There's a story about the Scottish Presbyterian pastor and theologian, Thomas Forsythe Torrance.

[9 : 56] Torrance was a chaplain during World War II. And one day on the battlefield in Italy during World War II, a dying soldier, a young man of about 20 years old, wounded and dying, grasped Torrance's hand and asked, is God really like Jesus?

Is God really like Jesus? Imagine for that young man, what an existential question that must have been. This young soldier is about to die and he's about to face his creator.

So he asked the chaplain, will God really turn out to be what we believe him to be? Is God really what we believe him to be in Jesus Christ?

Basically, his question is this, what is God like? Is this God whom I've trusted and whom I'm about to meet face to face? Who is my creator and my judge?

Is this God really going to turn out to be the compassionate father? Jesus said he is. Is this God going to be the kind of God Jesus showed him to be in his healings and in his pronouncements of forgiveness and his assurance of mercy?

[11 : 16] Well, Torrance did say to that young man, yes. And John, the Apostle John is saying to us here, a resounding yes to that question. God's display of love is an objective thing.

God's display of love is tangible. It is observable. It's revealed supremely through his one and only Son.

In this, the love of God was made manifest among us. John tells us. The love of God was revealed to us in this that God sent his only Son, his one and only Son into the world.

Do you want to know what true love is? Then it is seeing that God himself sent his Son into the world to take on a human body, to die for our sins.

True love, according to the Bible, is Jesus Christ personified. This is the Bible's definition of love.

This is, this is, by the way, this is important because John then, you can see why John's rebuke of the Antichrist in chapter four, verse three, is so crucial.

[12 : 40] Because what were the Antichrist doing? they've denied that God came in the flesh. They deny Jesus Christ. And there, John says, in chapter four, verse three, that those that do not confess that Jesus has come in the flesh, they are not from God.

They are the Antichrist. They are haters of the brethren. Now, it doesn't mean that they actively go around saying, I hate you, I hate you. But John is saying that by the very, by denying that Jesus has come, that God has come in the flesh, in Jesus Christ, that itself is an hatred of God and an hatred of the brethren.

Because what has John just done for us here? He's couched God's love in Jesus Christ. And not only in Jesus Christ, but in Jesus Christ coming into the world as taking on flesh.

And this is why it's significant. Because to deny that Jesus is fully God, rather, to deny that Jesus who is fully God, came and took on flesh, and became fully man, is to deny God's greatest display of love towards us.

Remember, all of you, I'm sure do, remember John 3, 16, for God so loved the world. That is the most common Bible verse. God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

[14 : 19] To deny this fundamental truth about God's display of love, to deny this definition of love, according to God, is not to have love at all, John is telling us.

So, John says, do you want to know what love is like? Look to Jesus. look especially to Jesus, who was fully God, who came into the world to take on humanity, so that, hence that verse, so that we might live through him.

That's the purpose for which he came. He came into the world, God's love was manifested through him, and God sent in him, for what purpose, to what end?

So that we might live through him. John is telling us this love is the means by which we are brought from death to life.

This is eternal life. This is what it looks like, as John says in his gospel, in John 17, 3. This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

[15 : 32] we cannot know this Jesus, who is the definition of God's love, by our own effort. It isn't just the intellect, it isn't by reasoning that we can come to this knowledge.

It isn't by striving, or walking out, or doing good, that we can come to this kind of love, to know it truly. See there again in verse 10.

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 is the one who initiates this love. God sent his son into the world for a specific purpose, to appease his just wrath for our sins, by making himself, that's what Jesus Christ did.

He made himself the sacrificial lamb, bearing upon himself, upon his shoulders, the sins of the whole world. We were rebels, aiders of God, yet God showed love towards us.

[16 : 54] we hated God, we hated his son, Jesus Christ, yet God displayed supremely his love towards us by nailing him to the cross for our sins.

Such was the deep love of God, that he showed his love to us when we were loveless. And I think John will have us see that, brothers and sisters, when he says God is love, you would have us see how magnanimous that, how far reaching that love is.

That it is not just a statement about the essential attribute of God. God is love is true, God is love, it is an attribute of him. But that's not where John puts the stress of that statement.

He wants us to see that when he says God is love, he wants us to see the historical dimension of that love, expressed in the person of Jesus Christ. He wants us to see Jesus Christ, that through his life, through his death, and through his resurrection, we can have the love of God.

It's like in the words of the Welsh hymn, here is love, vast as the ocean, loving kindness as the flood, when the prince of life himself became our ransom, and shed for us his precious blood.

[18:31] Do you want to know love? The love that can set you free, and give you spiritual life? Then look to the cross. It is there, in that place, that God's perfect love is displayed towards you.

It is based on this act of love, Christ's atoning death, for you and for me on the cross, that your guilt is removed. It is true, his atoning sacrifice, that you've been grafted into the family of God.

It is true, that act of God on the cross, that you now are a son in the family of God, a daughter in the family of God.

And now John tells us, in verse 11, what our obligation to know to God's love is. It's not just saying to us, God is love, and God shows his love supremely by dying on the cross for you.

He's saying, to what end then? So what then, if that is all true, verse 11, beloved, if God so loved us, if it is true that he sent his son to die for you, and he loved us so much, in such a magnanimous way, then we also are to love one another.

[20:02] John comes back again and again to the ethical command, to the ethical implication of what it means to know the love of God, to experience the love of God.

Now that you know love, and have been shown this love, beloved, you are obligated, you are obligated and required to love like God, your Father.

Now, what does that mean practically for us? Let's think about it. Remember that this is not a call by John to mere emotions and feelings. It's a call to action.

This is the Christian call to arms. It is a call to love. God's Son, Jesus, has shown the love of God to us by his once and for all atonement for our sins.

There on the cross, he made us who were aliens at one with God. God. And so now, those who trust in the Son, those who have come to, who have been born of this love, born of God, born by the Spirit, those of us who are made children of God, are then to exhibit that trait by our action, by the way we love one another.

[21:38] How does a child of God act, basically? John is telling us, well, look to Jesus, the preeminent Son of God. Do you want to know how to act?

Look to Jesus, the perfect Son. He has shown us. He was sent into the world to love. He was the messenger of God's love, supremely.

Now, if you are sons of God and daughters of God, you also are sent into the world to love, just like Jesus.

This, brothers and sisters, is an imperative. By imperative, I mean this is a command. It isn't just like when you feel like loving, you can love. When there's an emotion of love into you, then yeah, show love.

It is a command. To love. And this kind of love is not based purely on our feelings. In fact, it transcends our emotions.

[22:40] That's why Jesus says you should love your enemies. I don't know any one of you that feels like an outpouring emotion of love towards enemies. What's a natural inclination to people who are enemies?

Vengeance. We want to let them have it. But here, Jesus is a perfect example of God's love. And if we claim to be children of God, we have to be like him.

We ourselves then are sent, each one of us, sent out to love by Jesus. John ends these verses in verse 12 and says, no one has ever seen God.

God. If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. Essentially, what John is saying as he ends this here in verse 12 is, love for the believers, that is the display of love among us, is evidence, is the evidence that God dwells in us.

it's a beautiful mystery, isn't it, to think of it that way. We have not seen God, yet he has been revealed to us.

[24:04] You've not seen him because he's invisible, and yet at the same time, you know him.

He's been revealed to you. How? Through Jesus. through the love of Jesus, you know what God is like.

You know experientially, not just in your head, but in your heart, and in your mind, and in your soul, you know the love of God through Jesus Christ.

John is saying to us, if you've entrusted yourself to the only begotten son, if you know him as revealed in the Bible, if you love like he does, then you indeed have seen God.

He dwells in you, and his love is perfected in you. What he means by that is that his love is made complete in you.

Think about that. God's love is perfected in us. What a wonderful promise, what an astounding statement, and what a wonderful promise and assurance for those of us who are in Christ.

[25 : 19] If you love one another, God himself, God himself is visible in you. Do you understand what an astounding reality that is?

God has been saying to us all along, the supreme revelation of God is in Jesus Christ. But now he's saying to you, to us, if we love one another, if we love one another like Christ loves us, God also makes himself visible in us.

You, in your obedience to this command to love, exhibit the image of your Father, so that it is an evidence to you, in your heart, a confirmation and a comfort to you, when you love like Christ loved, this is evidence that God dwells in you.

But not only that, it is also evidence that his love is made complete in you. This is how John Stark puts it, God's love which originates in himself was manifested in his son and is now perpetuated in his people.

[26 : 59] Do you see that progression that John asked for us? God's love originates in himself, revealed supremely in the son, Jesus Christ, and now is perpetuated.

It's shown and advanced and is seen in his people. This is why John's command to love is crucial to what it means to be in the family of God.

love. You know, I think of that song, what the world needs now is love. I think it's Dionne Warwick who sang it. You know that song, you probably know what the world needs now is love, sweet love. It's the only thing there's just too little of. Well, I believe Dionne Warwick was right, but it's not the love as the world defines it.

That's not what the world needs. What the world needs, needs desperately, is love, the love of Christ as seen in Christ Jesus himself.

[28 : 11] What the world needs is love as the spine in and through Jesus Christ. And here, brothers and sisters, is the awesome responsibility that we have as the church.

It is among us and through us that the world will see that love. It is among us and through us that the world will see the love of Christ.

So it's non-negotiable. What are we saying about our Father? What story are we telling about Jesus Christ, our Savior?

How do you love your brother? How do you love your sister? Are you faithful in doing so? Are you telling a lie? Father, God who has loved you in sending his son to the world to die for your sins, to redeem you and rescue you.

Oh God, make us a people and a church known for displaying God's love. In real, tangible and active ways towards one another and to the world.

[29 : 28] Amen. Thank you.