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[0:00] Love Sunday. Did you get the theme? Every scripture, the college talks about love. An introductory question to you, which actually works functionally in your life? God is love or love is God?

But today's world flips what it should be from God is love to love is God. Let's talk about that. Love. Each Sunday we begin the worship, as you know, by giving a portion of what's called the Shema, Hebrew for hear, hear, hear, hear, O Israel.

And God says, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. And love your neighbor as yourself.

We begin each Sunday that way to get the focus correct on why we're here. Today we're going to talk about this word love. We're going to take the nebulous word and concretize it.

We're going to use the epistle that was read today from John the Apostle, 1 John chapter 4. We're going to cover verses 7 through 17.

[1:33] If you have a pew Bible, you might check that out in page 1212. Or if you're a device person, if you would turn to 1 John 4 in your device.

Now, this epistle, most scholars would say was written by John the Apostle. John, the beloved disciple who followed Jesus around, probably was a teenager at that time.

Some scholars say it couldn't have been John the Apostle because the heresy he's fighting in the epistle, called Gnosticism, wasn't even invented yet. While not true, Gnosticism has to do with secretly acquired knowledge, which moves us by degree up to heaven.

Believe me, in the Greek world, that was alive and well at the time of John the Apostle. And we know that when this was written, he was probably settled down, not a missionary anymore.

He was the bishop of the Diocese of Ephesus, which today is a ruin, but it's been reconstructed in what's today called Western Turkey.

[2:47] He would have been in charge of a number of house churches in Ephesus and surrounding villages. He wrote this letter to his parishioners as the bishop, giving them advice on how to live their lives.

His whole deal in the Apostle and in all of his epistles tended to be on God's love for us and how we express that love. And that's what goes on in today's epistle.

So we're going to split it into three sections. In the first section, verses 7 through 12, we're going to see how John takes a nebulous turn and moves it to the concrete.

How do you live love? To get to that, we need to do a little word study of love in the Bible. So the Hebrew word for this kind of love, a lot of Hebrew words are guttural.

So it's chesed. It's got a powerful sound to it. Chesed. That means extreme kindness. God just flowed over with extreme kindness for the people of Israel.

[4:13] And then when it comes into the Greek, Greek language is much more expansive than Hebrew language. Hebrew language is, once again, concrete.

It's got a meaning and you live by that meaning. Greek, holy moly. For love, you've got at least six words to express love in the Greek.

We're going to talk about four of them till we get to what John's talking about. So one of those first words that we are familiar with is phileos. All right.

Philadelphia. What's the nickname for Philadelphia? Brotherly love. City of brotherly love. Phileo means caring for someone close to us.

So I had a roommate in college. We got into a lot of hijinks. We went in the Marine Corps together. We were best men at each other's wedding. He's phileos to me.

[5:12] No blood relationship. But deep caring. That's phileos. Well, that's not what John's talking about in this epistle. Second is called storge.

Storge. We're going to have a quiz at the end of this, by the way. Storge is a family love. Okay. Mary Ellen and I happen to be married. We have children and grandchildren.

We love them dearly. We give them almost everything. Almost everything. It's a deep love for family members. That's not what John's talking about in the epistle.

The third Greek word is eros. It keeps the earth populated. We get the word erotic from it. That's sexual love.

That's not what John's talking about. So we finally get to the word a lot of us know in Greek called agape. Now I heard this in an advertisement the other day on TV.

[6:14] They were saying the ancient Greeks had a word that talks about real care. It's agape. Well, it's actually a biblical word. It's not an ancient Greek word.

It's a word that was made real in the Bible, in the New Testament. And it talks about total self-giving for the good of another.

That's where John landed in his epistle. Total self-giving for the good of another. Now, John, right? He's doing teaching in this epistle. Where did John get his teaching, his information to teach? Got a hint? Jesus, maybe?

Yeah, he followed Jesus around. He learned from Jesus. He knew the scriptures of that day, which was what we call the Old Testament. He had many verses memorized.

[7:22] He got a sense of the flow of God working with his people. And because he lived under the teachings of Jesus, he understood what Jesus was talking about when he talked about love.

So he's sending it out. Now, we're ready to go into the scripture. I'm going to read those first verses. 1 John 4, starting at 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, 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.

[8:36] Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God. But if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

That kind of love moves from a nebulous, total self-giving for the good of another into a concrete person.

God becomes a man. God brings the love tangibly into our lives.

This word, propitiation, that's a five-buck word, simply means turning away anger.

Jesus turned away the anger that we rightfully deserved. He did it on a cross.

[9:41] Deep, deep sacrifice for us. Propitiation, paying the bill. Does anybody ever get bills in the mail anymore?

I get, do you? Okay. I get, says this is what you paid for your bill. I don't know, it's all magic. But paying the bill is pretty important, isn't it?

The bill had to be paid for our sin. God, loving us, picked up the tab. God, He became a human being.

He died when we couldn't. Now that's a study of love and a concretization of what that love is. It's a person.

So that should be the end of the sermon, right? But wait, there's more. All right, second point. Verses 13 through 15.

[10:43] You know, sometimes you wish you had your glasses. And we have seen, is that?

Yeah, so anyway. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world.

Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in Him and He in God. You know, our whole person has to be involved in love.

And in the Bible, they talk about the mind. We talk about the heart. We talk about the body. Mind is our intellect. And even our will, sometimes called the soul.

Heart, in the Bible, means our emotions. We talk about, sometimes it takes a lifetime for faith to get from up here down to there. That needs to be done.

[12:01] And in like manner, our body responds positively. Thomas Aquinas was, his whole deal was, things start in the mind, they affect the will, they touch the feelings, and they affect the body.

Well, that's a good picture of a human being and how we respond to this kind of love. Do you know why tearjerker movies are so great?

They touch something inside us. That deep love God has put there. One of the great tearjerkers, now I hate tearjerker movies, but one of the great tearjerker movies was Sleepless in Seattle.

Anybody remember that? Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan. Tom was a widower, a young widower in Seattle.

He had a beautiful little boy. His life was devastated with the loss of his wife. Meanwhile, on the East Coast, Meg is just doing great.

[13:14] She's engaged. Everything's wonderful. But there's a hole. And the whole movie deals with how these two people come together.

And of course, through his wonderful little son, I don't want to ruin the movie for you, but it ends up on the Empire State Building. They fall in love. Oh, it touches your heart.

Baloney. Anyway, so, this kind of love that touches our hearts actually is planted by God. It's meant for us to use, to go closer to God.

In fact, you might say, lack of love equals lack of life. Think gangs in Syracuse. Probably not a whole lot of love in those gangs.

It's kill or be killed, isn't it? And a lot of politicians in Washington live that way, don't they? They're concerned about power.

[14:21] And they're not going to shoot anybody, but they're going to pulverize the character of people that they think is a threat. It's tough. I mean, not all the politicians are that way, but there seems to be a trend in that direction.

Lack of love equals lack of life. Slavery. The big presenting problem in our world today is addiction, isn't it?

Guess what? We are all addicted to sin. Some of us are addicted to various elements which bring sin into our hearts. Addiction brings slavery.

What was love gets wiped out in our need to find its satisfaction. Therefore, recovery brings freedom.

And that's why recovery programs... Hello! Welcome! Everybody is nicely dressed and looking good. How's the weather in Oswego today?

[15:38] Nice and warm. Okay, welcome. Welcome. Recovery means freedom. That's why recovery gatherings are so important.

Rehab centers. These are built to bring freedom from slavery. That's love in the spiritual sense.

God frees us from our addiction, brings us on the road to recovery, which is eternal recovery.

So, finally, how do you and I, how do we express that kind of love, that kind of real life? The bottom line is, how do we fulfill love as Christians?

Well, I can tell you, my views of expressing love have changed. Now, I grew up with two parents who deeply loved me.

But I suspect, growing up about ten miles from the Vermont border and that sort of natural New England standoffishness, that affected me.

[16:50] There was, even though we knew we were loved, there was really not a word love used. I never heard, I love you. I never said I loved you.

Why hug when you can shake a hand? So, the way I expressed love was kind of a standoffish. I had to learn about the wonderful gift of expressing love.

And one way I learned about it, not only in my marriage, but one way I learned about it intellectually, was in that wonderful book, The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe.

C.S. Lewis. When Aslan the lion allows himself to be sacrificed on the stone table so that the witch thinks she's won, such love by Aslan.

He had no need to be sacrificed for the people. What was it? What were the people? Where did they live? In Narnia.

[18:03] In Narnia. They had no, they had no reason to ask Aslan to save them. But he did. And that's how I, that's how I realized how much Jesus loves me.

He gave everything. I saw him in his goodness. And I realized that he understood me and I understood him.

And I could hug him. And I could say, I love you, Lord Jesus. That's how to express love. But we live in a world which moves us to self-fulfillment.

Now, there's nothing wrong with self-fulfillment except when you stomp on others to get there. So I have to be careful how I express love for God. It is very tempting to see God as a sugar daddy. He gives me what I want. And I want a lot. And I miss hugging God because I'm trying to get stuff out of him.

[19:16] How do I express my love for God? Family. How do I move from I'm going to love you until you don't love me back? Anybody ever been in a family?

How do I just love you because I'm part of your family? Parish. How many people have ever said I don't go there anymore because I didn't get that much out of it?

What do you give into it? Parish life is a gift. We give to one another. That's how we express God's love. And finally, our country, each of us are, I think, American citizens.

Okay? Some of us even remember President John F. Kennedy. What did he say? Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.

Wow. That's expressing love. I told you I lived close to New England growing up. So we get to the conclusion.

[20:30] Expressing love. verse 16. 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. God has given us each other in this parish.

We've just got each other as the world turns in weird directions. All the normal people in the world are right here in this room today.

Everybody else is weird. God has given us one another to express love. I want to conclude with a man.

How many of you have ever heard of the author John Stott? S-T-O-T-T? Yeah, John Stott died a few years ago at the age of 90.

[21:42] Did you know that John Stott had one parish his entire life? He was born into a parish called All Saints Langham Place.

His mother was a prominent member there. His father was an agnostic and never went to church. He was raised in that parish. He came to know Christ in that parish. He went off to college in seminary, finished seminary, was called to that parish as an assistant, eventually became rector of that parish, retired from that parish, and became rector emeritus until the day of his death.

90 years. One parish. He never got married. Somebody interviewed him and said, why did you never get married? He said, this parish is my family.

Well, that's a little extreme. But you think about that kind of love, that's expressing love for God in the parish family. Jesus loves you personally more deeply than those closest to you can love you. He wants you to know that He's not abandoning you and He never will. You're going to be with Him forever.

[23:05] And we'll join together in that wonderful forever. Let us pray. Lord God, thank you for this love, for Love Sunday, for offering your love to us.

Help us to offer it back to you. Amen. Amen. Amen.