

This is Love

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[0:00] Amen.

Please be seated. What I want to do this morning is show you that your kindness for my family in the midst of a very difficult week and what you do in an ongoing basis for one another week in and week out is not merely kindness.

In fact, it's theology in action. It is the Apostle John's words in his epistle made flesh to us. So I invite you to turn with me to 1 John chapter 4 verses 7 to 21.

If you have your pew Bible, that is on page 1212. Yes, 1212, page 1212 in your pew Bible. Now you've already heard that passage read by Brian.

John's argument in this passage builds from beginning to end. And we need the whole heart of it in front of us. So that's why I want you to be in the text this morning.

[1:51] First, we see there that God is love. And that makes a claim on us. That God is love makes a claim on us.

Second, God defined love in history through the sending of his Son. And thirdly, that love received transforms how we live.

Both towards God and towards one another. So let's walk through it together. Beginning in verse 7. John says, Beloved, let us love one another.

For love is from God. And whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. John opens with an exhortation there. Beloved, let us love one another.

Remember, this is not the first time he has said this in this one letter. He said it in chapter 2. And he said it in chapter 3. And here he says it again here in chapter 4.

[2:55] He's not being repetitive. For lack of, because he doesn't have anything to say. He's not being repetitive for lack of material. Rather, he's being pastoral. This is the thing the church most needs to hear.

And most needs to practice. And so he returns to it again and again. Like a physician who keeps coming back to the same diagnosis.

Because the patients keep forgetting to take the medicine. Doctors and physicians and diagnoses is really fresh in my mind. So that's what Apostle John is doing here.

He's returning to this because he knows this is the medicine we need. And this is the thing that diagnoses really the state of our hearts.

And what he does next is also important. He does not grant the command to love in mere sentiment. In social obligation.

[3:56] Or even in the example of Christ. Although you will come to that later. But first and foremost, he grants the command to love in the very nature of God.

For love is from God. Love is not a human invention. It's not something we devised and then attributed to God.

It moves in the other direction entirely. Love originates in God. Flows from God. And wherever you find genuine love. Self-giving.

Costly. Agape love. Wherever you find that. You're looking at something that has its source in God himself. This is why the exaltation is so radical.

When John says, let us love one another. He's not asking us to be nicer. Let us be nicer to one another. That's not really what he's saying here. He's asking us to participate in the very character of God.

[4:53] He's asking us to express in our very bodies. In our communities. In our daily lives. What God is like. Verse 8 gives us the flip side.

With equal bluntness. Look at verse 8. He says, anyone who does not love. Does not know God. Because God is love. That sentence, God is love. Has become one of the most abused sentences in the English language. In our current culture. The world takes it. And says it. But hollows it out of its true meaning. God is love, they say. Therefore, he would never judge anyone. God is love, they say. Therefore, I feel whatever I feel must be right. God is love, they say. Therefore, the church should affirm everything. And condemn nothing. Hence, a whole month is devoted to celebrating degeneracy.

[5:50] And the pressure arises. And the pressure arises. In our culture. For those of us who belong to God. To bow down to the idols of our age. But John does not leave God is love. As an abstraction. As our world does. John tells us what that means. He immediately shows us what he means by it. And what he means is not soft. Accommodating tolerance. Which is in fact no tolerance at all. As our world functionally conceives of it. What John means is this. He means something that would cost us everything. That's the kind of love he's talking about. The content of which is filled out by what comes next in these verses. First though. I want us to notice the logic of verse 8. If God is love. And love originates in God. [6:49] Then a person who does not love God. Gives us evidence that they do not know God. Do you see it? Not that they are imperfect in their love. Because we all are imperfect in our love. That's not what John is saying here. But he's saying a person in whom love is habitually. Habitually. Characteristically absent. That has no agape love. Emanating. Even as he stumbles and imperfectly attempts to be resembled God as father. Someone who doesn't have that at all. That person that has not had an encounter with the living God. That's what John is saying here. Because you cannot encounter a God who is love. And walk away unchanged on this point. That's John's bold claim here. It matters for how we evaluate our own spiritual condition. He goes on in verse 9. In this the love of God was made manifest among us. [7:57] That God sent his only son into the world. So that we might live through him. John does not let God is love float in the air as a mere slogan. He anchors it in history. He says to us. You want to know what love is? Look at what happened. In history. Look at the event. Look at the person. The word manifest is important here. What Paul means by that. God was made manifest among us. It means God was made visible. Made tangible. Made real in the realm of human experience. God's love was displayed on earth. And the display is the sending of his son. God comes and dwells with us. There's a story I've always found evocative of this. [8:53] A theologian named T.F. Torrance. Who served as a chaplain in World War II. Tells this story. He says on a day on a battlefield in Italy. A dying soldier. Only 20 years old this soldier. Grasped his arm. And asked. Is God really like Jesus? Is God really like Jesus? Think about what that young man was asking. He was on the edge of death. He was about to meet his creator. And the question burning in him was. Will God turn out to be what Jesus showed him to be? Is the God I'm about to meet. The compassionate father. Jesus described. And embodied. That's what John is saying. That yes. That is indeed the case. And John's answer to that soldier. Is yes. The son. The son of God is not a soft version of the father. [9:50] He's not a kinder representation of a harsher, crueler God. The son is the father's love made visible. When you look at Jesus. Healing the sick. Pronouncing forgiveness. On the sinners. Sitting with them. To eat with them. Weeping at the grave of a friend. And ultimately going to the cross. When you look at Jesus doing all of that. You're looking at what God is like.

God the father. God the son. And God the holy spirit. You're looking at what the three persons of the Godhead is like. You're looking at love defined for us.

And the purpose of God sending the son is to what end? As John tells us. It's so that we might live through him. That we might live through him. This is not the extension of our lifespan.

[10:47] That's not what he's saying here. Merely. Rather. That we might live through him. Is that we might live in the fullest sense of life. Life as God intended.

Life connected to its source. Life that death cannot extinguish. That's the life that's been spoken of here. You know. We had lost that life. We had lost that life. When our first fathers and mother sinned.

And separated themselves from God's rule and way. And we had followed in their footsteps. We had become separated from the one who is the source of our life. And God.

In love. Sent his son. To restore us. To that life. 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 of our sins. We hear that word. Propitiation. Every Sunday. In the comfortable words. This is the most important verse in the passage.

[11:47] For us to understand. The definition of love. I think. And we need to sit with it. John draws a contrast. For us here. Love is not.

Love is emphatically not. Us reaching up to God. Love rather. Is God reaching down to us. The initiative.

The origin. The source. Of the movement. All of it. Is God. He initiates the love. He moves towards us.

We did not love first. We were. As Paul says elsewhere. Enemies of God. The world hated Jesus. The world that God loved.

God nailed his love. His begotten. Only begotten son. They nailed him to the cross. We nailed him to the cross. In a sense.

[12:44] We cannot divide. Define love for ourselves. Because we don't know what it is. We must take God's definition. Revealed in the Holy Scripture. God shows us.

What love is. And then John uses a word. That the church today. Has largely abandoned. Because. That word stands harsh. To us. To our mother and her. He uses this word.

Propitiation. That word means. Atoning sacrifice. Specifically. It's the kind of sacrifice. That satisfies. Or. That appeases. A just. And righteous wrath. Of God. God is not merely loving. God is also.

Holy. He is a righteous judge. Who cannot simply overlook sin. As if. It did not matter. Sin matters. It matters infinitely.

[13:43] Because it's an offense against an infinite God. And it matters practically. Because it destroys the very people God loves. And so. Paul gives us this word.

Propitiation. And. Right. John rather. Gives us this word. Propitiation. An atoning sacrifice. And he says. This word describes. This word describes. The answer to the dilemma.

That we're in. The son of God. The son. Steps into the gap. For us. He absorbs. Upon himself. The just wrath of God. In his own body.

On the cross. He becomes the sacrificial lamb. Bearing upon his shoulders. The sins of the whole world. God provided. God provided. This sacrifice. This sacrifice.

In his son. God sent the son. To fulfill. This. And when we were loveless. He did this. He loved us anyway.

[14:42] In the words of that great Welsh hymn. Here is love. Vast. As the ocean. Loving kindness. As the flood.

When the prince of life. Our ransom. Shed for us. Is precious blood. Do you want to know love? Real love.

Love that can bear weight. Love that costs something. Love that does not evaporate. When the feelings fade. Look to the cross.

It is there. That God's perfect love is displayed. Towards you perfectly. It is there. That your guilt is removed. It is there. That the barrier. Between you and God. Is torn away.

And. John goes on in verse 11. Beloved. If God so loved us. If this is all true. If God so loved us. We also. Haught to love.

[15 : 43] One another. Having shown us. The definition of love. In the cross. John draws. The only possible conclusion. If this is how God loves.

At this cost. With this initiative. Towards people. Who were his enemies. Then. We. Who have received this love.

Are obligated. To reproduce it. To resemble it. The word ought. Here. Is the word of moral necessity. It's not.

Take it or leave it. It's. This is your. This is obedience. To God's command. This is a. A moral. Requirement. That you love one another.

It's not a suggestion. It's not merely. A good idea. If you. Truly. Received the love of God. If you. Understand. What the cross. Means. For you.

[16 : 38] Personally. Then. Love for others. Is the natural. Inevitable. Necessary. Response. You cannot. Be a beneficiary. Of this love.

Of God. And remain. Unchanged. Towards people. Around you. Verse 12. No one. Has ever seen God. If we love.

One another. God abides in us. And his love. Is perfected in us. Now this verse. Stops me. Every time I read it. John makes. What sounds like. A discouraging statement. No one has ever seen God.

And that's true. God. In his essence. Is invisible. Transcending. Beyond our natural capacity. To perceive. But then John. Says something extraordinary. Here. If we love one another.

That's the extraordinary. Extraordinary thing. If we love one another. Love one another. God abides in us. And his love. Is perfected. His love. Is brought.

[17 : 34] To its intended. Completion. In us. What an understanding. Thing to say. Which means. That when a community. Of believers. Genuinely. Loves one another.

God becomes visible. Through them. He made himself. Visible. Supremely. In Jesus. That's what John. Says in his gospel. John chapter 1. Verse 18. No one has ever seen God.

The only son. Who is at the father's. Right hand. Who is at the father's side. He has made him known. Jesus. Christ. Is the definitive. Perfect.

Unrepeatable. Revelation of God. But now John says. In his epistle. Says. If we love one another. God also makes himself. Visible in us. Not in the same way.

That he makes himself. Visible in Jesus. Because we are not. In the incarnation of God. But he does. Make himself. Visible in us. In a real. Observable. World facing way. The love of God.

[18 : 31] Is made tangible. When it shows up. In a community. Of people. Who love each other. What did Jesus say? In one of his farewell address.

The world will know. You are. My disciples. In what way? By how you love one another. That's how the world will know. That you are mine.

John Stott puts it this way. God's love. Which originates in himself. And was manifested in his son. Is perpetuated. In his people. It's continued. That love is continued. In his people. The chain of love. That begins in the heart. Of the eternal God. Descends. To us. In the son. And is now. Extended through us. To the world.

[19 : 26] This is why. What you did for my family. This week. And what you're. Continuing to do. Is not merely kindness. It's quite literally. God making himself. Visible.

Through you. It is the love of God. Being perpetuated. In his people. This is. This is. Real. Real theology. Put into action.

Listen. I've seen God's love. This week. In the love. And the care. And the kindness. Bestowed upon me. And my wife. And my children.

I've seen it. In you. And I pray that. What you've done. For me. You will do. For one another. We will continue. To do for one another. And that those. Who come among us. Will see it.

They will see it. And they will ask. What's the source of this? Who are these people? Who are these people? Who are these people? Let's look at the ground.

[20 : 20] Of our assurance. In this. John goes on. In verse 13 to 16. He says this. But by this. We know. 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 testified. 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. So we have come to know. And to believe. That the love. That God has for us. God is love. And whoever abides in love.

Abides in God. And God abides in him. This may seem. Beyond us. As we're thinking about all of it. But in these. Next. Verses. 13 to 16. John. Elves us to ground. The love. In the person of Jesus. And gives us assurance.

[21:15] That even as we love him. Perfectly. We can be assured. Of God's love towards us. And that we are in him. John shifts now. From the command to love. To the question of assurance.

How do we know. That we truly belong to God. How do we know. You know. Many Christians. Live in constant doubt. Of God's love for them. Maybe that's you as well.

Never quite assured. That you are truly redeemed. Or forgiven. Or accepted. As sons and daughters of God. But John wants to tell you. This morning. That you are.

If you're in Christ. And he gives us three. Pieces of evidence. That we truly. That shows us. That we truly abide in God. The first one is that. Is in verse 13. He has given us his Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit. Is the ground. Of everything. The Holy Spirit. Is the ground of everything. He was purchased. He was purchased for us. By Jesus Christ. Galatians 3.

[22:14] Tells us that. He's the first. He's the down payment. Of our inheritance. He's God's gift. To us. Those who are in Christ. The Spirit. Is not an optional.

Extra. For the advanced Christian. We've seen that. Rather. The Spirit. Is the gift. Of God. Giving. To every believer.

At the moment. Of new birth. The moment. You are born again. Into Christ. You're in Christ. The Holy Spirit. Is given to you. He's the one. Who does the work.

Of conforming us. To Christ. He's the one. Who enables us. To love. Producing obedience. In us. And he's the one. Who kills sin.

In us. This is important. You say. Well. I don't feel like. The Holy Spirit. Is doing a very good job. Of killing sin. Sometimes I feel that way. But you. Feel conviction.

[23:09] And sorrow. Over your sin. Do you run to God. When you stumble. Well. That's not you. In your. In your own. Earthly.

Flesh. Because. Left to you. You are dead in sin. That's what Paul says. The very fact. That you feel. Pricked. And sorrow. And guilt. That leads to repentance.

The right guilt. That leads to repentance. That leads you. To turn into Christ. And look into the cross. The very fact. That you are feeling that. And you do feel that. Is that the Holy Spirit.

God the Holy Spirit. Is at work. In you. Convicting you of sin. Leading you. And drawing you to Christ. Bringing you to the cross. Enabling you to love one another.

Second. We confess. John says. That Jesus is the son of God. And is the savior of the world. In verse 14 to 15. John says. This genuine confession of Christ.

[24:08] Is spirit produced. He says. No one can say. Jesus is Lord. Except. By the Holy Spirit. If you find yourself.

Genuinely confessing Christ. Not merely. As a cultural habit. But as the central conviction. Of your soul. That is the evidence. Of the spirit of work in you.

Many people confess. Jesus is Lord. Culturally. For when the culture shifts. When danger comes. When loss. Comes. When there's opposition.

They capitulate. But if you will stake your life. On that confession. Jesus is Lord. Come what may. That is the Holy Spirit of work in you.

Third. John says. We abide in love. Verse 16. Verse 16 gives us the beautiful summary. God is love. And whoever abides. Whoever abides.

[25:06] In love. Abides in God. And God abides in him. The presence of love. In your life. Genuine. Costly.

Others oriented. Not self focused. Others oriented. Love. The presence of that. Is evidence. Of the indwelling spirit. You cannot manufacture.

Agape love. From your own resources. It's impossible. Look at the world around us. Look at the variations of love. Look at how self focused.

Empty. Vapid it is. Look at the love of God. In Christ Jesus. Inexhaustible. Powerful beyond measure. When you see that love in yourself.

When you see it in your brothers and sisters. When you find yourself loving people. You have no natural reason to love. When you discover a capacity for sacrifice and service. That surprises even you.

[26:08] That is the spirit's work in you. It is the evidence that God has made you his own. These three things. The spirit. The Holy Spirit. The confession that Christ is Lord.

That Jesus is Lord. And the love. That emanates from God. Through you. Are not three separate things. They are one reality. Viewed.

From three angles. The Holy Spirit is the root. Confession and love. Are its fruit. And so when you see the fruit. You can have confidence about the root.

That I am indeed in God. And Paul continues and talks about this perfect love. Brothers and sisters. I want you to hear this verse 17 and 18.

This perfect love casts out fear. We live in a culture. And in a climate where. To love like Christ calls us to do. Because part of that.

[27:06] Loving like Christ calls us to do. Is to obey. Right? Jesus already said that. And obeying Jesus. Being with Jesus. Makes us enemies of the world. We've been looking at that. In these previous weeks.

To love like that. May bring fear. And trepidation. In a world that hates God. And hates those who belong to him. But Jesus.

Through St. John. Wants us to see. That this perfect love. Casts out fear. By this love. By this is love perfected with us. So that we may have confidence. For the day of judgment.

Because as he is also. So also are we. In this world. As he is. So also are we. In this world. John tells us that God's love. Has a goal. God does not love us aimlessly.

He loves us with a purpose. His love will be brought to completion in us. Perfected. John says. Accomplished. Brought to its intended end. And what is that end.

[28:03] To which God's love is working in us. It's confidence before God. Specifically. Confidence in the day of judgment. Here's why it says it. There is no fear in love.

But perfect love. Casts out fear. For fear. Has to do with punishment. Whoever fears. Has not been perfected in love. The fear.

John is describing in verse 18. Is not godly reverence for God. It's. Rather. He's talking. He's talking about a healthy. Appropriate whole. Before the creator. The fear is describing.

That. In verse 18. Is the. Is the kind of dread. Of the criminal. Who stands. Guilty. In a court of law. And is waiting for the armor. To fall upon him. Awaiting the sentence.

The punishment. For his sins. The terror. Of someone who knows. That judgment is coming. And he has no defense. No advocate. Nothing to offer. For his own defense.

[29:06] For his own record. That fear is rational. If you're standing before a holy God. On your own merits. You should fear that. For John is saying to us. We have no need.

To have that fear. We have no need. Why? Because we have an advocate. We have a defense. Our record.

Of sin. Has been expunged. Has been paid for. Has been canceled. By him. Who came into the world. To love us.

When we were loveless. That is why John says. Perfect love. Casts out all fear. You. Have. Experienced. This perfect love. Of Jesus Christ. Live in that.

Love. Be courageous. In that love. Be bold. In the world. In that love. Be fearless. In that love. Verse 19 to 21.

[30:03] We love because. God first loved us. We love because. He first loved us. If anyone says. I love God. And hates his brother. He's a liar. For he who 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.

Verse 19. Is the bedrock of everything. John has been saying to us. And it's worth making the whole passage turn on it. As we look at this. We love. We love.

Because. He first. Loved us. This sentence settles two things at once. First. It settles the question of sequence. God's love.

Comes first. Always. It's never the case that we earned God's love. We didn't earn it. He gives it to us. As a gift.

[31:00] It's always the case that God's love. Produces. In us. Our love. Second. It settles the question of source. Our love for one another.

Is not ultimately. A human achievement. The love that you see. Displayed among us. It's not the human achievement. We should not.

Pat ourselves on the back. And say. Oh. Look how great we are. How wonderful. How better than those people we are. Rather. When you see that fruit. Displayed. Look to God. In Christ. And be thankful. And be grateful. For his love. Emanating from him. And being. Displayed in you.

And through you. John has walked us through a complete argument here. In these verses. God is love. Not in the world's thin.

[31:55] Feeling based sense. But in the sense that love. Is God's essential nature. And when that love is received. When it is known.

And believed. That love does two things. It casts out fear. Because you know you stand before a God who loves you. With the same love that he has for his only begotten son.

And that love. After casting out fear. Now flows outward. Producing in you. A love for your brothers and sisters. That you could not generate on your own.

Making God visible to the world. Through your community. This is the upward spiral. Of the Christian life that John is describing. God loves us.

We receive that love by the spirit. The spirit now produces that love in us. For one another. And as we love one another. We see the miracle of the spirit. At work in us.

[32:51] Which deepens our assurance. Which deepens our joy. Which overflows in more love. From glory to glory. I began this morning by telling you.

That I have seen this week. That love displayed. I have seen God. In you. I have seen his love perpetuated. In his people. I have been the recipient. Of what John is describing here.

The love that is from God. That flows from people. Who have been born of God. And know God. My prayer for us. Holy Trinity. Is that this. Will increasingly.

Be our identity. Not our reputation. For a nice building. I don't want that to be our identity. Our building is nice. I like our sanctuary. It's not.

You know. Not. It wouldn't rank up there. As the. You know. Most beautiful church in the world. But we love it. And it's beautiful to us. But that's not our reputation. Our thing we want to stake our identity on.

[33:50] Not our liturgy. I love our liturgy. Our programs. Well. Our programs probably need some improvement actually. But none of those things are things we want to stake our reputation on.

Here's what we want to stake our reputation on. That we love one another. That when people walk through our doors. And into our lives.

They encounter something. They cannot fully explain. They encounter a community of people who love each other at cost. Who show up for one another.

Who do not leave each other alone in their hardest weeks. And when they ask where that love comes from. The answer will be clear to them.

As they continue to observe us. They will say. We love. Because he first loved us. I thank God for you.

[34:51] Upon remembrance of you. And your display of love. Towards one another. And I. Charge you. Do not grow weary.

In bearing witness. To this love. Which is from God. Make. It known. To the world around us.

Do not grow weary. May God make it so. Among us and through us. To his glory. And his renown.

In the name of the Father. And of the Son. And of the Holy Spirit.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.