

To Reveal God's Love

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Preacher: Wayne Schuller

[0 : 00] Friends, let's pray. Lord our God, may the words I've prepared today encourage your people and solidify us in your great love shown in Jesus.

Amen. Please be seated, friends. Well, we believe that the whole Bible is the word of God and that you shouldn't pick and choose your favourite bits out and make them only the word of God to the exclusion of other texts in the Bible.

But it is right, I think, to find passages that you find particularly gripping or inspiring and make them your own. And I think 7 and 8 today, verse 7 and 8 of 1 John 4, do that for me.

So if you've got it open, you can look at it, but I'll read it to you. Here is what John inspires us with. Aren't they among the most beautiful and inspiring words of Scripture?

They are life to us. Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. And whoever does not love does not know God because God is love.

[1 : 30] That is just classic, you know, inspiring Scripture that is just food for the soul. But, friends, also these verses present something of a puzzle to us, something of even a problem to us, because depending on what you think love is, that verse will be right and true and beautiful, or it will become blasphemous.

Depending on what you say love is, God is love. Well, you're either going to make something majestic and true about God, or you are going to distort the truth about who God is.

What does it mean to say that everyone who loves is born of God? Doesn't everyone love? Doesn't everyone love someone? Everyone loves their mum or their kids? So if everyone loves someone, does that mean everyone knows God?

Why then would John have to say, if you don't love, you don't know God? What quantity or type of love is John talking about that by it is the measure of knowing God or not?

What is love, friends? Is it the love of a parent to a child? Is it that family type love? Or is it the kind of disinterested benevolence, that kind of dutiful love that we sometimes put on it in church?

[2 : 59] Is it the secular kind of love, you know, that kind of tolerance of different beliefs? Is that what it's talking about? Is it intoxicated passion? Is it fire?

Is this love Mother Teresa or is it Britney Spears? Or neither? Depending on how you define love, you're going to have a different God and a different reading of who knows God.

And also, you're going to have a different kind of church because John goes on to say, because God loves us, we must love one another. And so our love is going to have to be modeled on whatever God's love is. And that worries me a bit because I don't really like hugs.

And often the text, love one another, is interpreted as saying, let's have more hugs. Now, you may like hugs. That's fine with you. In my family, after dinner, we'll have a Bible story and say prayer and sing a song.

And then my son will ask me, Dad, do you have strength? And I'll think about it, whether I've got strength. And I'll say, yes, Josiah, I do have strength. And he'll say, do you want to fight?

[4 : 08] And that's how we show love in my house. We have massive fights. And in fact, I'm bearing a scarf from a recent family fight session just on the weekend.

I'm not a huggy person. You may be, and that's good. But, you know, what does it mean to actually say we're going to be a church that loves one another? Are we all thinking about the same thing?

And so, of course, our love for each other is going to be modeled on whatever God's love is. Now, luckily, the only way we can solve this puzzle is to actually let John the Apostle define what love is.

And then we can read that back into God is love and read that into love one another. And letting John tell us what love is will solve this puzzle. And it's an encouragement because if only divided Christian churches or infighting Christians would actually do this.

Look at what John says love is and let that be their definition of what God's love is. So in verses 9 and 10, if you are reading 1 John in your daily Bible reading, you would underline verses 9 and 10 because he gives us the definition of what love is.

[5 : 20] God's love was revealed among us in this way. In this way. He's saying this is it. This is concretely God's love. God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him.

God's love is son-centered love. God's love is Christ-centered love. God's love is rescue love. God sent his son into the world that we might live through him.

The life of love that John talks about is life living through Jesus. It's the Jesus-driven or the Jesus-centered life. In case you're not with me, John says it again to make it even more crystal clear in verse 10.

In this is love. This is it. This is your definition. Not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

God's love comes before our love. And God's Christ-centered love is cross-centered love. God's love is rescue love seen in the cross and death and blood of his son.

[6 : 38] So when you think of the love of God, you are to think of Jesus and to think of the cross. He doesn't say God loves you.

He actually says God loved you. How does God show his love? He loved you in that specific act of sending Jesus to die as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

God loved us because he sent Jesus to die for our sin, to take the punishment. So for John, to speak of God's love does not exclude categories of punishment.

It doesn't say that God never gets angry. He's not saying God is sort of warm to us all the time. He's actually saying God has both love and judgment. It's sin.

And later we'll see he talks about punishment and judgment. But what he is saying is that God loves us by dealing with our sin. God loves us by dealing with the punishment we deserve.

[7 : 37] He places on Christ. That's the atoning sacrifice. That's the atonement. In the old school Bible translations, it had a great word for this.

It called it, he sent Jesus as a propitiation for our sins, which meant that Jesus on the cross propitiated God. He turned aside God's anger and wrath onto himself so that we could know God's forgiveness.

That is where God's love is shown on the cross. You see, in the Bible, we've got to be really clear about this. God never condones sin.

He's never indifferent to our disobedience. There's a great text in the Bible, Hebrews 9.27. I know it from memory. It's man is destined to die once and after that face judgment.

And so what God does in his love is to send Jesus to be the atoning sacrifice to take that punishment judgment away from us and onto himself.

[8 : 44] So God is holy and just, punishes sin, but he's also loving and desires to rescue us. So God's greatest act of love, his definitional act of his love is the cross of Christ.

So the most objective, effective and spectacular revelation of God's love is in the atoning death of Jesus. God's love is Christ-centered and cross-centered.

It's rescue love. God's love language is the cross. I can't say it enough that when we think of God's love, John exhorts us to think of the gift of Jesus dying on the cross.

So going from there, John then can challenge us. He says in verse 11, Beloved, since God loved us so much, we should love one another.

And that's a common challenge in this book of 1 John. He keeps saying, love one another, love one another. So what does it mean for us to love one another? Well, he says, since God loved us so much, or more literally, since in this way God loved us, in this cross way, we should love one another.

[9 : 58] So what he's saying is that you don't just do the loving things that you think are loving to other people, and you may do some good things. You may show acts of service and love and care.

He's actually saying we should love one another modeled on the cross. And he gives us three very challenging ways to love one another that I don't think we naturally will do unless we are taught them by the word of God.

The first way he says we can love one another comes in verse 12 to 16. And it's basically he's saying, you love one another by, in the power of the Spirit, you talk about Jesus as Savior.

You testify to each other. Verse 12 says, No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected or made mature in us.

How will that work? What will it mean to love one another and have God live in us? Because we can't see God. Well, what he's talking about is we can't see God, but in a sense we can see his love in the cross.

[11 : 04] And so if we want God to abide in us and dwell among us, we need to be talking about the cross. We see this in 13 and 14. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he's given us the Spirit, and we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent the Son as the Savior of the world.

So we love one another by speaking about his love, testifying about Jesus is the Savior of the world. He's the one who died for the sins of the world, the Lamb of God.

And so it's a very concrete way of loving one another by talking about Jesus, by testifying. This is really made crystal clear in verse 15. Who does God abide in?

God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So I think what he's picturing is, as we confess, as we talk about, isn't it great that Jesus died for us?

Or as we sing it, or celebrate it, or as we visit each other and pray for each other that we would receive the cross of Christ, people get converted or people come to assurance, and then God dwells in us by his Spirit.

[12 : 20] The more you talk about the cross, the power of the gospel is at work, and God abides. God abides. So John is talking about more than hugs, more than even just acts of service.

He's talking about us testifying to the cross to each other. Verse 16 is a good summary. So we have known and believed the love that God has for us.

Remember, we've known and believed the love God has for us in the cross. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

So he's talking about sharing and celebrating the cross of Christ together. As that happens, we abide in love, and we abide in God.

Now, there's a second way we can do it. The second way we can grow into this love of God, this Christ-centered, cross-centered love of God, is in having a hope in the face of death.

[13 : 26] Verse 17 teaches, Love has been perfected among us in this, that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world.

John assumes that there's a day of judgment, a day that Paul the Apostle says is a day of glory and honor and immortality for some, and a day of wrath and distress for others.

And basically he's saying, if you know the love of God, that is, if you know that the atoning sacrifice love of God, then you can actually have boldness on the day of judgment.

Even though God will lay open all those things you've done wrong, you know that the blood of Christ has atoned for your sin. Therefore, you do not fear the day of judgment.

In fact, you have boldness on it. You can boast in the cross on that day, because you know you're forgiven. John says, Because as he is, as Jesus is, so are we in the world.

[14 : 30] Jesus stands vindicated. He's resurrected from that atoning sacrifice. He's justified in the presence of God. And as he is, so are we now.

Our day of judgment has been settled. We know the result of that day. We know that we are forgiven and made clean and made righteous by his death. So friends, the mature Christian has boldness in the day of judgment, which basically means we can die well.

The Christian can die well. Have you ever thought about how you'd like to die? We don't like to think about it, I don't think. I would rather know I'm going to die than get hit by a bus or something like that, or have a heart attack or something like that and just sort of go.

I would rather know it's coming. And I would like to die on my deathbed saying the name of Jesus. Because the name of Jesus is the name that signifies to me God's love, that I can have boldness in the face of death.

Friends, you might fear the pain of dying. I don't really like thinking about the pain of dying. And I don't like thinking about what it would mean to actually let go of life and step out into the kind of unknown to meet God.

[15 : 48] Those things make me a bit nervous about death. But I'm not nervous about my eternity. And neither should you be. You can have full confidence, boldness, that you have eternity with God if you trust in Jesus.

If you know God's love, his Christ-centered love, his cross-centered love. So friends, there are two ways that we can live out the love of God. We can speak about it, we can testify to Jesus as Savior.

And we can have boldness in the face of death, preparing for judgment. And there's a third way, and it's the more general way, verse 19 to 21.

It's that love that we're going to show for each other day to day. He says, We love because he first loved us. Those who say, Oh, I love God, and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars.

They're liars. For those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this.

[16 : 54] Those who love God must love their brothers or sisters also. This too is a bit of a puzzle, I think, because why does he say, you cannot say you, if you say you love God and hate people, your brothers and sisters in the church, in your spiritual family, you're a liar.

I would have said, if you say you love God and you hate people who are your spiritual family, you're a hypocrite or you're disobedient. But what is it that makes you a liar for not loving your brother or sister?

Ever thought about that? I've puzzled over this. And the best answer I've got is by coming back to the definition of love. Remember it? The definition of God's love is to send Jesus as an atoning sacrifice for sin.

So if you say you love God, if you say you love his love, if you say you love the cross, you love the blood of Christ, then you have to realize that blood has bought other people and that you will want to love the people that that cross has bought, that blood has bought.

If you don't love your brother and sister in the church, then you're actually lying about the cross. You're lying about knowing the love of God in the cross because you're failing to recognize that it applies to your brother and sister in the church, and the church is bought with the blood of Christ.

[18 : 18] So friends, let me challenge you to a deep love of each other. That love will be many and various. It will be in testifying to the cross of Christ.

It will be in encouraging each other to have boldness on the day of judgment. We'll even get to act out the cross to each other. Earlier in 1 John 3.16, John says we should lay our lives down for each other because Christ laid down his life for us.

You see, in everything we do, the love is shown in imitating the cross or talking about the cross or meditating on the cross. There the love of God is seen.

So friends, let me challenge you. When you ponder God's love, when you ponder, does God love me? Think about the cross. Think about that Jesus died for you. He died for us.

This is what God's love is. God's love is not a generic goodwill stance towards the world. God's love is not some universal benevolence.

[19 : 24] God's love is not indifference toward human disobedience. God's love is Christ-centered, cross-centered, atonement-centered, rescue love for you and for me.

And so now I think, if we go back to the beginning, if we go back to verse 7 and 8, they make a lot more sense. Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

That is, everyone who cherishes and receives the atoning love of Christ on the cross knows God and is born of God. Everyone who has that bold hope clearly knows God through Jesus.

Whoever does not love does not know God. Whoever does not, that is saying, whoever doesn't cherish the love of God, the Christ-centered, cross-centered love of God, doesn't know God.

For God is love. Again, friends, it's not saying that you worship love. It's saying, it's like, to use a footy analogy, it's like saying, Eddie Maguire is Collingwood.

[20 : 33] What are we saying when we say Eddie Maguire is Collingwood? There was a great story this week how James Packer tried to bully Eddie to not be the Collingwood president and he ended up quitting the job to keep the footy club.

Stunning. Now, Eddie Maguire is Collingwood. To say God is love is to say that God's greatest passion is his son Jesus and the rescue mission of Jesus, which is to die as an atoning sacrifice.

To say God is love is to say something about the cross and the centrality of Jesus in our lives. So, friends, as you approach this Easter, I want to encourage you to, for this time as we're leading up to Easter, to be meditating on the cross of Christ and to be experiencing in a deeper and more profound way a more joyful way the love of God, for we find it in the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

So may your hope be built on nothing less than on the Christ-centered, cross-centered love of our great God. Let's bow our heads and pray. Lord our God, we worship and praise and adore you that you are love and that your love is this, that you sent your son to die as an atoning sacrifice for our sin.

Dear God, may your love shape our love of each other. May we continually speak of the cross to each other. May we testify to Jesus as Savior with the conviction and boldness of the Spirit.

[22 : 12] May we also have a boldness in the face of death. Dear God, may knowing your love in Christ and his death make us confident and not guilty, but confident that we will pass through the day of judgment forgiven and invited to join with you forever in heaven.

And dear God, may we love each other, laying down our lives, copying the cross in all that we do. And in doing so, Father, may we point the world to your love in Jesus.

Amen.