

It's All About Love

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[0 : 00] Now let's turn for a short time tonight to the passage we read in 1st John and we're going to look at verses 7 to 12 of this chapter, chapter 4 of 1st John 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.

Many people are mistaken about what love actually is, not just because it's difficult to define it, which it is to some extent, but you'll find people having the idea that love is pretty much just a feeling of some kind, like other feelings, or perhaps you find people saying that love is an ideal, something to be aspired to, something that's held, just like other things, as a kind of ideal thing, but not really having much to do actually with your practice or with your activity.

John actually says a lot about love, but he tells us a lot about what love is and what love is not. And one thing he makes very clear is that love has no meaning at all without action.

If we say that we are loving and that we do love people without action to demonstrate that, our claim is useless, it is empty, it is meaningless.

[1 : 41] That's why he says, for example, in chapter 3 and verse 18, that we are not to love in word and talk, but in deed and in truth.

In other words, John, as he was facing heretics, people who were going about with false teaching, one of the things that he needed to correct to keep those that he was writing to here on the right path spiritually, was to give a definition of love or a demonstration of what love really is about, because the false teachers were really twisting that into something that love in fact is not.

And we are just looking at it as something internal without necessarily requiring any type of action, either in helping other people or in social action.

You will find throughout this letter of John that one of the tests that he gives to us as to whether or not we are Christians and whether or not we really genuinely do love people is how we actually treat other people of different kinds.

And that's why John combines in this passage the love that God expects of us and the love that God himself has shown toward us. And in fact, it's the more you begin with the love that God has shown toward us, especially in Jesus Christ and in the death of Christ, which God willing we'll be remembering tomorrow in the communion.

[3 : 16] The more you begin with that and see love as it's defined there on God's part and in God's action, because God didn't just say that he loved his people, he showed that by his action in sending his son, and as this passage puts it, to be a propitiation for our sins.

There is the love of God as it is seen in the action of sending his son and his son to be a propitiation. And as you begin with that, then you move on to finding your definition of our love because it's really got to be patterned upon and essentially be the same in its action as the love of God.

That's why John is putting it this way. 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.

And then he says, beloved, in verse 11, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. So he begins with God's love and moves on from there to define what our love must be like as well.

That's really briefly what we want to look at tonight. First of all, God's love, just as it's defined in this passage or explained to us in this passage, so we could, of course, enlarge on that, even in John's own letter here.

[4 : 44] But God's love, first of all, and then we'll come to the passage as it says something about Christian love, especially the love of God's people, those who know God, as it's put here, as their

saviour.

First of all, God's love, and he says, love is from God. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God.

Or love is of God, it really means from God. Where did love come from? See, this is one of the things that atheists have a problem with. They don't really have a problem in the sense of the existence of evil in the world.

But there is a problem with love in the world. Where does love come from? If people who are inherently in themselves selfish, as we all admit to be, where does love come from?

How do we actually find such a thing as love in this world that we belong to among human beings?

Well, he says, it is from God. The origin of love is God himself.

[5 : 44] And if we love as we must love one another and love God, then that has come from God. It isn't just that he shows us what love is in his own exercise of it, but he enables us to love with a love that should be patterned on his love.

In other words, if we experience an act of Christian love on our own part, if we find ourselves exercising Christian love, whether it's for other Christians, for people who are not Christians, even for people who are, as Jesus put it, we have to love our enemies.

Difficult though that is. If we find ourselves doing that, as we should, then he says, that itself means we have a living relationship with God.

Because you can only do that from God and from being in a living relationship with God. That's what he says. Anyone who does not love does not know God.

Whoever does love has been born of God and knows God. For John, it's really quite simple. A person who refuses to love is giving no evidence whatsoever, whatever they claim to be, even if they claim to be a Christian, and a Christian of long standing.

[7 : 08] If they refuse to exercise love when it is required, then they have no basis to their claim of being a Christian. Because when, as we'll see, we are born again, when we are brought to know God, one of the things that immediately comes into our lives is the exercise of love.

That doesn't mean that people who are not Christians can't love in any sense at all. Of course, that would not be true to experience. But what it's dealing with here is Christian love and the responsibility that lies on the people of God who confess God as their God and as their Savior, whatever anyone else does or does not do.

That is absolutely required because it is something essential to the person who knows God and has been born of God. Because he says, God is love.

Not only is love from God, but God himself is love. And that's an amazing statement.

Because it doesn't just mean something like love is one of the properties that God has among many other properties such as power or wisdom or justice.

[8 : 34] When it says that God is love, it means that every single aspect of God's actions and God's very being is marked by love.

If you want to define something of the nature of God, John is saying this is really the best way you can define the nature of God as far as our limited understanding is able to take that in.

He is love. It isn't just that he loves, but he is love. He loves because he is love. It's essential to him.

It's part of his being. It's something that has always marked God as God describes his nature. And that's the love that God has revealed is the next thing he mentions here.

So love is from God. It has its origin in God. Love is something that God is. And then he says in verse 9, In this the love of God was made manifest among us.

[9 : 38] You see, it's not just God claiming to have love and claiming to love us. He's proved that. He's shown his love for his people in what is a remarkable thing in itself.

That he sent his son into the world so that we might live through him. And in fact, you could say that much of the passage there really is to do with the manifestation of the love of God.

How it has been revealed in his actions. Remember what he said at the beginning. Love is really meaningless without actions that love does.

And the action that God's love has done you could say is twofold. He sent his son into the world. That's the first thing. It's shown in his sending of his son.

Secondly, he gave his son. Now that word is not used here but it's used in that famous verse in John 3.16 God so loved the world that he gave.

[10 : 42] But it's actually in this passage as well in the whole idea of sending his son to be a propitiation. We're going to touch on that tonight but God willing tomorrow we're going to open that up a bit more from chapter 2 for the communion service itself to look at the propitiation that Christ is in himself and what that means for us.

But what he's saying here is that here is how God made manifest how he revealed how he opened his love to view that God sent his only son or one and only son into the world.

Now what does that mean about Jesus? Well first of all it means that Jesus must have existed when he was sent into the world.

He wasn't actually in the world and that means that he was himself as John puts it especially he was with God and he was God.

Jesus is not a mere human being though he is a human being. He was sent by the Father by God the Father into the world.

[11 : 56] He came from where he had always been from heaven. We have of course mystery involved in that and without plunging into the mysteries of it the Bible tells us that God as one God is three persons the Father the Son the Holy Spirit and each of these persons though there is only one God not three Gods I know we can't get this into our heads I can't get it into my head and you have to say the same because it's the mystery of God's being but it's true because the Bible tells us and each of these persons has his own role in our redemption the Father is the one who sends the Son the Son is the one who came willingly as the servant of the Father to die on the cross the Holy Spirit is the one who takes the salvation that Jesus has brought into being by his death and resurrection and comes to apply that to our hearts so that by it we are born again that is in a very brief summary how God the three persons is involved in our salvation and what he's saying here is that

God showed his love and you can still see the love of God as you read the Bible as it tells you about God sending his only Son into the world it involves a commissioning of the Son it involves the Son coming to be a servant of the Father it involves that God had given him a commandment as Jesus himself put it to finish to accomplish that's why when he finished on the cross when he died when it came to that moment he said it is finished and Jesus meant by that although it meant a lot of things it meant this too that the work that was given him to do as the servant of the Father that was it done he had paid the price of our sins by his death and because he had done that he could say in all truthfulness it is finished I have done it I have completed the task nothing else needs to be done for sin to be forgiven he sent his Son he gave his Son because the Son came to be the propitiation that's a big theological word and it's important that we actually have some idea of what it means we're going to open it up as I said tomorrow

God willing but just in passing just now let's just say that it really means something to do with the anger of God being met and satisfied God has a personal anger against sin that's your sin and my sin as transgressors of the law of God I know a lot of people you'll hear nowadays saying that's not the kind of God we believe in nowadays well maybe not but it's the kind of God we believe in from the Bible because that's what God's word teaches us we can't actually say as we keep on mentioning but it's important to mention we can't just say that because some people or even many people today would say to you that's not our understanding of the Bible anymore because things have moved on in human understanding and in psychology and in analysis of human personality and all the rest of it these things were written by people before all that came into being well it was written by God because we either believe this Bible to be the word of God or we don't there are no alternatives and if it is the word of God then it's the word of God in every generation and you can't actually expect that God would actually change this word just to fit in with human understanding when God tells us that he has a personal wrath against sin that is how it is but the great thing is that in sending his son into the world

God was doing that so as to deal with his own wrath in other words it's the love of God that sent his son to be the propitiation and the wonderful thing is is that God addressed his own wrath against sin by his love in what he did in his love it's not to do with God being an angry God and Jesus taking away his anger and turning him into a God of love he already was a God of love God is love and it's as love that he sent his son into the world and he sent his son into the world as a propitiation for our sins in other words the death that Jesus died on the cross is a propitiation it meets the demands of God in his wrath so that it is no longer directed against all who come to trust in Jesus there is no condemnation to them that's the message of the gospel so that his sending of the son into the world

was for this purpose and he puts it here in verse 9 so that we might live through him now you cannot live if the wrath of God is directed against you that means certain death everlasting death but the death that Jesus died is that everlasting death that he took upon himself to die so that we might live through him that we might not come to die that death you see isn't that such an amazing act of God that we who sinned against him who don't deserve that he should treat us this way and yet in his great love this is exactly what he did not so that he would be turned into a God of love but that this great

God of love would turn us from condemnation into salvation and would turn us from having the wrath of God against us to having his favor instead and his acceptance that really brings you to Jesus himself how do you come to have all the advantages of what God's love has provided in Jesus as a propitiation well quite simply you accept Jesus as your savior that's what the gospel is offering us believe in the Lord Jesus Christ that means trust in him trust your life to him and you shall be saved that's what you're told here this is why he sent his son into the world so that we might live through him and you know it's a wrong emphasis to say that God sent his son [19:43] Jesus Christ into the world to condemn the world to actually bring condemnation to be something very real to people in their sins yes there is a condemnation but God sent his son into the world to undo that condemnation and if you follow on that great passage in John 3 16 God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life what's the next verse for God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through him might be saved that's God's emphasis that's the emphasis of God's love that's why he loved as he loved so that you and I people like you and I would come to be saved that we might live through him that is

God's love and that's really just touching the surface of it as you see it in these details in this passage but then from that we move on to our Christian love beloved let us love one another for love is from God and it's very interesting isn't it that this great apostle John he was the last of the apostles we understand to survive the apostolic age and in his very old age tradition has it that he lived in Ephesus and taught people right up to his very old age such a you can imagine just such an experienced but such an incredibly holy man and yet he's saying beloved let us love one another just as he said all the way through this letter where there are things required of everybody whether they're apostles or not he is actually saying

I'm involved in that as well I'm not exempt from confessing my sins I'm not exempt from needing God's grace I'm not exempt from requiring the strength of God to go on day by day John even though he was so experienced in his Christian life and understanding beloved let us love one another in other words he doesn't want anything of these fellow Christians that he's writing to for them to love without applying it to himself first that's why he says beloved those that I am loving let us love one another in other words love too requires relationships of course it does beloved let us love one another and love is not an option it's an obligation love is not an option it's an obligation beloved let us love one another for love is from

God and in verse 11 if God so loved us we also ought to love one another in other words just as love is essential to God it's something that defines it's something that you cannot think of God without so too he's saying as he joins that to Christian love you can't think of a Christian without Christian love without love being exercised by them and that's why he's saying in the passage it doesn't matter what we say we are it doesn't matter who says that they are Christians without love and the practice of love and of course that has so many practical dimensions to it as chapter 3 very much shows people who are in need he says if you just say go and be warmed or find something or we just pass by and say I'll pray for you if you can help them and you don't then your claim to love is meaningless and just as it is with God that love is essential to his being so it is to the being of a Christian you might say that if you think of a child ordinarily born and immediately showing a likeness to either one or perhaps both parents well usually just one parent but people will say well that child is so like their father or maybe it's their mother it's the same spiritually when we are born again we are born with the likeness of our father we are born with love inherent natural to us in our spiritual life our spiritual state and we can't think of it otherwise if God so loved us we also ought to love one another that's come from being born again that's in other words you cannot but love and you could say that you know one of the things that we often look for is assurance that we are Christians how do we know for sure that our sins are forgiven how do we know for sure that we are in the right relationship with God and especially when we find ourselves from time to time lapsing in

our thoughts or in our actions or our words various things that show we are not perfect anything but perfect sometimes

[25 : 38] Satan will take hold of that and say what are you saying you are a Christian but really should a Christian do that sort of thing and if you do that sort of thing if you have these thoughts in your mind how can you be a Christian well John is saying that if we genuinely love one another love God and love others as we require to well that itself is an evidence that we are born again because that kind of love doesn't exist without being born again love for God can you love the commandments of God without being born again can you love God's own very perfect demands upon us without being born again you can't of course you can't it's not a thing you're naturally drawn towards you're naturally repelled by the commands of God until God actually comes to change you inwardly and when you come to be born again then you're saying with the psalmist oh how I love your law it is my study all the day and what he's saying here

John is saying is that this is a proof in itself that we have indeed been born again that we love as we are required to love and of course we owe it to God as well that's really another aspect of verse 11 beloved if God so loved us we ought also to love one another you see the love of God wonderful thing that it is but it places demands upon us when we've come to know him and one of the primary demands that it places upon us is that we love one another we ought to love because we've come to know God it's placed an obligation on us we owe it to God having loved us as he has to love one another following his example and yet of course we love willingly that's another aspect of love I'll just mention that but it is important in itself you don't love reluctantly you don't love in a way that forces it upon you love has to be a willing giving of yourself in love love is not something that is stern and just is done just out of a bare sense of duty well I know I need to love so I'd better start doing it that's not love that's a cold feeling perhaps that's something that's just really not the kind of thing that love is at all love is a willing spontaneous activity flows from your heart but it comes willingly to be done in its actions so love is an obligation not an option but there's one other thing just to close with and that is that love makes

God visible now I have to be careful how we put things and I put that deliberately to be perhaps a little bit provocative love makes God visible what he's saying here is that no one has seen God at any time no one has ever seen God if we love one another God abides in us and his love is perfected in us but that reminds us of a very similar verse in the gospel of John and in the very opening chapter of John where he talks there about Jesus and his superiority above Moses for example he says no one has ever seen God the only begotten who is in the father's bosom or at the father's side he has made him known in other words he's saying nobody has really ever seen God but he has become visible if you like he's become real to us in

Jesus Christ as Jesus said in John 14 to Philip when Philip said Lord show us the father and that will do us that will suffice us and he turned to Philip and he said Philip do you not understand this yet whoever has seen me has seen the father in other words you see what God is like you see into the very heart of God as you see Jesus Christ and in a similar way what he's saying here really is that while no one has ever seen God and God being spirit is invisible but how do you make God real to people who don't believe how do you make God real to people who reject your claim of the gospel calling them to Jesus Christ and to put their confidence in him what is it really that proves most convincing in a

[31 : 10] Christian's life it's this that they love one another no one has seen God at any time if we love one another God abides in us God lives in us and his love is perfected it reaches its purpose in us just as John records Jesus great prayer in John chapter 17 where you find Jesus shortly before he went out to die the death he died on the cross remember that wonderful chapter 17 where he says to the father as he prays to them that he he prays that all his people may be one as you father are in me and I in you and that of course means when you think of being one you can't think of being one except as it is a unity in love in loving one another but he said this so that the world may believe that you sent me and then he said a little later on very similarly he said

I in them and you in me so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even even as you loved me you want the world to be convinced that a Christian life is worth living you want the world to be convinced that there is a God yes ultimately only God can convince us of that we know that but what John is saying here is that to make God real to people we need to love one another as he loved us and as we do so you will have a convincing life you will have a life that whatever people think of it you can't argue against it when it is filled with love it is filled with God because God is love

and so that applies to us tonight as we come to approach the Lord's supper tomorrow that God has loved us and shown his love to us in sending his son that is what we are going to remember at the Lord's supper and that he did so to be a propitiation the kind of death he died to deal with wrath against us to take it away so that we might live through him and that places an obligation that we come as people who love the Lord and who love one another and to seek to love others too as God has loved us and as we do so we trust that that will make God real or as we put it visible to other people through our life and lifestyle because to say and yet not to do is to have a life that's poor and powerless and very ineffective we pray that God will bless his word to us let's briefly pray Lord our gracious God we ask that your blessing will follow our consideration of your word and especially that you would impress your own love upon us more and more each day so that we might find ourselves following in your footsteps who showed us the way of love and who continues to point it to us in your word hear us we pray now and accept us for Jesus sake

Amen now as I said at the beginning of the service tonight we have the sacrament of baptism administered it's something that is not often administered to adults in our own setting in the practice of the church that the fact that it is doesn't mean in any way that it militates against infant baptism being a proper thing but nor does it mean that we're not in the practice of baptizing adults as we're going to do tonight and it is an important occasion not that baptizing an infant is not an important occasion it's an important occasion too when we come to adult baptism because adult baptism does involve the person themselves making a confession and an acknowledgement that God is in covenant with themselves and they with him and that they have a relationship with him that is signified in baptism as baptism signifies the washing of our sins and our being joined to Christ for our sanctification it doesn't convey that it doesn't make a person a Christian but it does represent it it's something which is a sign of our washing by the

Lord from our sins so this is an occasion before we come to the actual baptism itself where each of us here whether we were baptized as infants or as adults have the opportunity to apply what we're seeing tonight to ourselves and we're seeing not just the way in which baptism signifies the washing away of our sins we're seeing something else that there should be a very short step between baptism and taking communion let me say that again there should be a very short step in time and in experience between being baptized and taking communion and that applies even if we are baptized as infants we should not think that being baptized as an infant means you can delay actually taking communion because it only belongs to somebody way into the mists of history when you get older the Lord's table the Lord's supper is for those who love the Lord and those who are baptized ought to be people who love the

[38 : 00] Lord what I mean by that is those who are baptized as infants ought to make it their duty and their work as soon as possible to be in a position to come to take communion to show their love for the Lord to be what their baptism shows them they ought to be so we have to really think about it in these terms that we should not as we usually do unfortunately think that baptism as it is mostly administered to infants then there's a long long gap almost inevitably in our thinking before people come to be communicants that ought not to be how we think about it at all when we see a baptism let's ask ourselves why haven't I if I'm not yet a communicant why haven't I I have all the privileges given to me in baptism I have access to the gospel

I have fellowship with God's people I've become a member of the visible church with all the privileges that gives me in the gospel why haven't I a communicant because I have not actually attended to my responsibilities because I have not taken the right steps with urgency with seriousness towards becoming a communicant now that's how reformed thinking always has regarded certain reformed Calvinistic thinking the connection between being baptized and coming to take communion in Illy's case tonight she's going to be baptized and then within 24 hours she'll be taking communion for how it's a very short step in time between baptism and taking communion but that's how we should think about it for all of us as baptized people we should be thinking now the next step for me must be being in a position to take communion to come to the Lord to know the Lord to love the Lord to trust in the Lord to want to witness to him to take what he has given in the supper for us I just think of it in those terms as we come tonight to the baptism believe you can come forward please do you believe in God as revealed in scripture father son and holy spirit to be the only true God do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ the only mediator between us and God do you also now promise to endeavor to walk in the ways of the Lord and to follow him God and to God and to God and to God Almighty God we give thanks for this moment and for all

that is contained in it for ourselves as a people as we witness baptism of one who has made confession that you are her

God and that she belongs to you we thank you for that confession we bless you Lord that you have brought Ellie to this point in her life we thank you for the clear testament that she bears to your love and to her love for you we pray that you would bless this to herself that it might be a means of strengthening her as she reflects upon it that it might be to us as a congregation and as witnesses of it tonight a means of reflection for ourselves a means of putting to ourselves what our relationship with you as our God ought to be so bless her we pray and bless us to her and bless those of her family who are here with us to be part of this moment and to share it with her and to enjoy what it means to see her doing this Lord we give the glory to you and the praise and honour belongs to you and so we would seek to ascribe that to you and as we do so confess our sin and as the sacrament symbolises the washing of our sin we pray

Lord in your grace that you would wash away our sins and that for those whose sins are already forgiven that it may be tonight a means of assuring us that we are indeed pardoned with the pardon that has been secured by the death of Christ hear us now we pray for his name amen please remain stand so ■ walk to ■ he margaret campbell i baptize you in the name of the lord god the father the son and the holy spirit one god may god bless you and keep you make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you may he lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

[43 : 31] Bless, O Lord, we pray what we have done in your name. May this water of baptism be to Ilya means that will be reflected upon as a means of grace for the rest of our days.

Grant to her, O Lord, we pray that she may be a continuing living witness for you in this world.

Strengthen her for saving you in your kingdom. Give her, we pray, all that we would desire for her of the freshness of your love each day, of your protective care for her in her life.

And be for her, O Lord, each and every moment of life a God who keeps her from falling, and a God who will present her at last before your presence with exceeding joy.

Hear our prayer, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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