

First John (15) - God's Love Made Clear

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 0 0] John chapter 4. Tonight we're looking at verses 7 to 12 of this chapter. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

So on down as far as verse 12. Why should Christians love one another?

Or to put it another way, what is it that compels us, or ought to compel us, to love one another as Christians? There are various answers, of course, to that question.

Some of them provided by John himself, as we've seen even already as we've gone through this first letter. For example, chapter 3, verses 14 to 15. We have passed from death to life, he says.

We know that this is the case because we love the brothers. In other words, the loving of our fellow Christians is itself an evidence that we have passed from death to life.

[1 : 0 4] That our life has been changed. That God has done something in our lives to give us a new perspective compared to what we had before. Or you could go to the end of this chapter itself, or also to verse 23 of the previous chapter, where you find the love that we need to have for one another as something that God has commanded.

This is his commandment. Verse 23 of chapter 3. This is his commandment that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as he has commanded us.

And towards the end of chapter 4 tonight, as we read, you'll have noticed there the final verse there. And this is his commandment that we have from him. Whoever loves God must love his brother also.

And whoever says that he loves God but doesn't love his brother is a liar, John is saying. For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

So these are two compelling reasons why we love one another. But there's more than that. There's a higher reason. There's something more than anything else that ought to compel us to love one another.

[2 : 1 6] And provides us with the ground as to why we should love one another. And that is in this passage tonight, the love of God himself. This is particularly what we have before us this evening.

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. And you see that the way John is building up his argument here from the love of God himself towards the love that we are to have for each other and how that really fits together in the argument of the passage in such a wonderful way.

It is the most compelling reason why we are to love one another that God has loved us and shown himself to love the likes of what we are as sinners.

And more particularly, we can say that John divides this into three reasons or we can divide the passage into three reasons that have to do with God's love as the ground from which we are to love one another or the compelling reason as to why we must love one another.

[3 : 34] First of all, the fact that God is love. We're going to name it in three facts because they are facts. They're not ideals. They're not theories. They are facts.

The fact that God is love in verses 7 to 8 as we've read through them. The second fact is that God has loved us. Verses 9 to 11.

In this, the love of God was made manifest, that God sent his only son into the world. 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.

And so that's the second fact that compels us and compels God's people to love God. It's the great motivating fact that moves us to love him in response to his love, that he has loved us in Christ.

And the third reason, as you find in verse 12, is the fact that God's love is actually shown through our love for one another.

[4 : 34] God's love is made known and seen and made visible, if you like, in the love that God's people exercise towards one another.

So let's look at these three points and divide them into various points as we go through them. First of all, the fact that God is love. This great fact, this great emphasis in the passage.

He says, first of all, love is from God. Beloved, let us love one another. And you notice there that John is not asking or requiring anything of his readers that he's not, first of all, putting to himself.

He's not leaving himself out of this requirement to love his fellow disciples, his fellow Christians. Let us love one another. This is something that he himself has an obligation to do as a Christian, as a believer, as in Christ.

But he's saying, for love is from God. This is the source of love. This is where you find your definition of love. This is where love comes from. Love is not something, Christian love, love for our fellow Christians, is not something that we've come to produce ourselves.

[5 : 40] And love, as he puts it here in an absolute sense, love is from God. He is the source of love. If you want to find out where love comes from, and how you're to define love and understand love, you don't go to human beings.

First of all, you go to God. You go to God as one who is the source of love. And that's why he's actually saying, along with that, whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

You see, there's the logical conclusion that he's come to from the fact that God is the source of love. Well, if God is the source of love, and if we do love one another, whoever loves has been born of God.

He is or she is a product of that love of God. And the consequence of that is that that product of the love of God, this born-again person, loves. Because love is from God.

But he goes further than that. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. Now he's taking us further than just saying that love is from God.

[6 : 49] Now he's saying that God is love. That God himself is love. And that's really making it very clear that love is actually something that belongs to the being of God.

We're not to think of the love of God. Look at verses 8 and 16, where this is again repeated, that God is love. You have it in these two verses. John is repeating it twice in the passage just to drive home the point.

God is love. When you think about God being love, you're not to think of God as love. That is something he does, among many other things that he does.

That doesn't mean that God does not exercise love, of course. But you mustn't think of God being love primarily as something he does, along with many other things that he does.

What he's telling us here is that God is love. Not just that God loves, and God shows his love, and God embraces people in his love, but he actually is love.

[7 : 55] In other words, it's essential to the being of God. It's something that you cannot think of God without. He is love. We're not going to go into any of the theology of that, because as we'll see, what John is really doing is taking out the wonder of this love, the greatness of this love, that this is incomparable love, that this love is love that is greater than any other love, and that every other love that is true love is patterned upon this love of God.

This is its template. This is where it takes its point of departure from. And it follows again from the fact that God is love, and he says the conclusion from that, in the negative sense, is that anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

You see, John wonderfully merges and interchanges the words that he's using, knowing God, loving God, believing in God. They're all so wonderfully connected together, and what he's saying to us here is anyone who does not love does not know God.

Having said everyone, anyone who does love has been born of God, because God is the source of love, but anyone now who does not love does not know God. We cannot say, I know God.

God is my friend. I'm in a relationship with God, where I know Him as my God, where He's personal to me, and yet not love. John is saying, no, that's not possible. That just isn't credible.

[9 : 25] That doesn't stand the test. If we don't love, then we negate the very claim that we know God. And wherever, instead of love, we practice hatred, then that actually gives the lie to any claim we might have that we know God, that we're in fellowship with God.

It's as important as that for John, because remember, John is countering false teaching, teaching from people who shunned these true Christians that he's writing to. People who are trying to take them aside into their definitions of love, rather than what God gave through the apostles to His church.

And here is John demonstrating that anyone who does not love really doesn't know God. You see, these heretics were saying, we're the ones who really know God. We're on a higher level of knowledge than you people are.

You haven't graduated yet to the stage that we are at in our knowledge of God because we've added to what the apostles were given and were teaching. We've become something more of an elite kind of teaching group.

So you better listen to us and come and join us. That's what John is counteracting. That's what you need to counteract in our society, in our day as well, and in the wider church of the day. Or you find people leaving the sufficiency of Scripture, the completeness of Scripture, the apostolic doctrines that God has laid down for His church for all time.

[10 : 53] They're not from God. These variations, these additions, these additions to what God has already set and laid down for us.

What John is saying, anyone who does not love does not know God. But God is love. So that's the first great fact, the fact that God is love.

What's your own response to that tonight? Before we go further into it, what is your response even to that fact itself, that God is love, and that you know that God is love because God is telling you, because His Word is telling you?

How does that make, in your own heart, how does that register? I don't want to just ask you, how does it make you feel?

It's much more about what you think, how your mind engages with it, rather than your emotions or how you feel, though. You don't want to leave these out. But when you read here and you come to accept that this is what the Bible is saying, God is love.

[12 : 07] What is your response to that? How does it fit into your own thinking, your own way of life, your own relationship as such to God, to your fellow human beings?

Well, let's just leave the question just now and we'll come back to it perhaps before we finish because John is taking us further into this. Let's look at the second great fact. Not just the fact that God is love, but the fact that God has loved us.

That's another step, isn't it? One thing to know that God is love. And you can keep that as a great fact, but it's another thing to know that God has loved us.

That He has taken steps to show that He has loved us. That He has loved us in this particular way that John goes on to speak about. In other words, he's saying here, in this, in verse 9 he says, in this the love of God was made manifest among us that God sent His only Son into the world.

In other words, he's saying God has made His love clear. He's exposed His love for us to see it. And He's done this particularly in this great act of sending His Son into the world.

[13 : 17] You don't really have to ask the question, where can I see the love of God? Where is the love of God made clear to me? Where is it distinct above everywhere else? It's in this.

What He has done in Christ and what He has done in His Son and through His Son? And God, of course, here is God the Father in distinction from God the Son.

But He's saying, in this His love was made manifest among us that God sent His only Son into the world that we might live through Him. And 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.

Now, when you collect all the passages in which John refers to the Father and to the Son and to the relationship between them, even without going into the rest of the Bible, you very soon begin to understand that God is three persons, that our salvation is Trinitarian, that there is a role for God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit without these being three gods.

We don't worship gods, we worship God. But we worship the triune God, the God who is three persons in the very mystery of His being. And what John is doing is drawing us towards this God who is three persons and telling us that each of them has a role in our redemption, in our salvation, and even in the revelation of His love to us.

[14 : 55] Because His love is made manifest manifest in that God the Father sent His Son into the world. And of course, when you take account of the other passages in the Bible, we haven't got time to really go into this this evening, but when you do that, when you bring them all together, when you accumulate them, you begin then to see that Jesus Himself is God.

When it says that God sent His Son, He didn't send anyone less than Himself. He didn't send somebody who began to exist when Jesus was born as a human being.

He sent the Eternal Son. We'll see in a minute the words that are used, the descriptions that are used for who was sent. He sent one who was, as John begins his Gospel, who was the Word with God and who was God and is God.

And as we'll see, that's really part of John's argument as to how great this love is. He didn't send somebody less than this.

He didn't actually ask anyone else to come and take the place of sinners to die the death of the cross. He sent His Son. And you all have to read, you only have to read John 17, that really magnificent prayer of Jesus.

[16 : 20] and please don't think of that the way liberal theology sometimes presents it to you, as the reflections of the church worked into the form of a prayer, as if this didn't really happen in the upper room.

There is Jesus with the disciples. This is the prayer He prayed. This is how He addressed the Father. This is how He described Himself. And this is what He was requesting for Himself. Father, glorify Me with Yourself, with the glory I had with You before the world was.

Only God can say that. And that's who He is. And that's who was sent by the Father. He sent His Son. And to show that it is indeed the greatest love, we could say that John here is really emphasizing three things.

In the fact that God loved us with the love that's greater than any other love, on which every other true love has to be patterned, let's ask it in the form of three questions.

who was sent? He sent His only Son. Why was He sent? He was sent to die, to be the propitiation for our sins.

[17 : 31] And for whom was He sent? He was sent for the likes of you and I, for sinful, lost human beings.

That's why He was sent, to save us, to rescue us, to bring us back to God. Let's follow out these three questions and it shows you in answering them by the words that the passage itself contains, that this indeed is the greatest love of all, the love of God.

The love of God expressed in His love for sinners manifested in Christ especially. Who was sent? Well, look at the words. This is His only Son in verse 9.

He sent His only Son to be the propitiation. Now, that doesn't, it doesn't mean that God doesn't have other sons. Why is this said to be His only Son?

Why elsewhere do you find in John and in the Bible and in Paul's writings an emphasis on adoption that God brings us into His family and makes us sons and daughters because this Son of God, this second person of the Trinity, this eternal Son is God's Son in a way that no other is.

[18 : 47] The older translations had the word only begotten. But the emphasis really is not so much on the begetting but on the person Himself being unique.

He is His one and only Son in the way He is Son to the Father, in the way that He belongs in that relationship to the Father that no one else comes into possession of.

It doesn't lessen the greatness of our sonship in Christ but it does protect the sonship of Jesus from being like any other sonship.

What are you saying? He sent His only Son, His one and only Son, His only begotten Son, whatever the translations are. He sent His Son in verse 10. And when you come to verse 14 which we're not going as far as this evening but obviously there are things in the rest of the passage that fit in with it.

In verse 14 He's saying there that He sent His Son or literally actually in the Greek text of this passage that really is the Son. He sent the Son.

[19 : 56] A definite reference to the Son with the Father. The Father sent the Son. The only Son He had to send.

His only begotten. His beloved Son. His one and only. He sent Him into the world. And that's the force of the argument then when you come to verse 11.

Beloved, if God so loved us. Now often do you find in our study of Scripture that sometimes the tiniest words have the greatest force. And that verse would read quite differently or much less powerfully than it does if the word so was missed out.

But what He's saying is Beloved, if God so loved us. If God loved us in this manner. If God loved us to this extent. If God loved us with this quality of love.

If God loved us with such a love that is greater than any other love. If God loved us with that love. If He so loved us. Just like John 3.16 God so loved the world.

[21 : 01] He loved the world with this kind of love. With this wonderful love. With this unexampled love. This love. He so loved us.

Then we ought to love one another. And I think the force of that so carries on into the remainder of that verse. If God so loved us we ought also to love one another.

In other words we seek to follow the love of God in the quality of love that we show to one another. He so loved us so we have to so love one another with a love that's patterned on that finds the love of God as our temple.

What a great challenge that is. Because as we'll go on to see it's a love that really gave his own son to the death of the cross.

But let's just ask the question what does this make you think? How does this actually register in your mind in your heart? Or you can add how does it make you feel as well if you like? That God so loved us when you think of who was sent and who was sent to do what he was sent to do.

[22 : 16] You see when you go to the cross of Christ and you think of what happened there and you find the Bible's description let's think of it in the way that the epistle to the Hebrews invites us to do.

Let us go out to him outside of the camp that place of the curse that place of the cross that place of the death of Christ let's go out to him bearing his reproach and you as it were look up to Christ and you see him on the cross and you understand something of what's leaving him there and why God placed him there.

Well you can't turn away from that and then live a selfish life. You can't turn away from that and refuse to love your fellow Christians because that love is the unselfish love of God that sent his son into the world and then why did he send him?

Because that continues the emphasis and the powerful emphasis as it is. He sent him into the world to die. He sent him into the world to die the death of the cross. To die the death that's described here as the propitiation for our sins.

Now we're not going into the theology of that this evening. It's an important word in its own right. Sometimes it's translated expiation, the covering of sin. God covering sin from his sight in the way that he deals with sin for the benefit of his people and their salvation.

[23 : 45] Or propitiation here where it means to deal with the wrath of God. And you see, this is what he's saying. The love of God provides the means by which his own wrath is appeased or dealt with and turned out of the way for his people.

It's not turning God from a God of anger into a God of love. It's God in his love dealing with his own anger so that it's no longer directed against his people, but rather against his son in their place.

That's why he sent him into the world. He sent him into the world to die, the propitiation for our sins. And John's concern is not here to go into the theology of the word propitiation itself, though of course you can't leave that out of it.

As we said earlier, the burden of the passage really is to emphasize the greatness of the love, the quality of the love, love, how unparalleled this love is, how it's above every other example of love, the love of God.

That's what compels our love for one another, nothing less than this love that sent the Son into the world and that sent the Son to die, the death of the cross. Now we mentioned that you can't leave the cross of Christ if you've come really to embrace it, if you've come to appreciate it and take that Jesus to yourself.

[25 : 10] you can't leave that then and live a selfish life. Because love essentially means to give. You give to the person you love.

It's shown in all kinds of relationships in life. You love your children, you give to them things which will benefit, things which will make them happy. You love your wife, you love your husband, so you give to them.

that emphasis is at the very heart of marriage. And even if you're not married and single, you still know what it is to give to people you love. But what this is emphasizing more than anything else is that love is the giving of yourself.

The giving of yourself. That's what God gave. He gave in His Son. He gave His Son to die the death of the cross and Jesus gave Himself.

for His people. Love is really costly. True love is never cheap.

[26 : 21] True love never ceases to give. And it doesn't just that it gives. It gives for the good of others.

God loved, as we'll see in a minute, the likes of us. When His love for sinners, for their salvation, sent His Son into the world so that He would die the death of the cross in their place, remember that He wasn't actually loving people who began to love Him first.

That's the third question. For whom was He sent? He was sent for sinners. See these words here? These little words again?

We are us. Who is John talking about? What kind of people is he talking about? Is he thinking about people that were easily loved by God or lovable or loved because they were lovable?

Was the love of God attracted towards them? because there was something in them that he saw constrained him to love them? No. They were unlovable.

[27 : 38] They were the very opposite of himself. They were his enemies. We are. That's what we are, sinners. That's how we're born into the world, in enmity against God.

And don't think that that's not the case with you or with anyone else who's a sinner like you and like me. He was sent to rescue sinners.

Sinners out of their lostness. Sinners under the wrath of God for their sins. And it wasn't because we are lovable, but because he is love.

That's why we have rescue. That's why we have salvation. That's why the son was sent into the world. God the father sent the son to die the death of the cross.

That's why there is a propitiation for our sins. That's why there is a provision by God himself through his son to deal with our sin, to deal with our dilemma as sinners, to deal with our lostness, to deal with our enmity, to deal with our pollutedness, to deal with everything that characterizes our sinfulness.

[28 : 50] There's nothing there attractive to God, but it's because he is love that he showed his love and exercised his love in sending his son.

Now let me ask the question again of myself before I ask it of anyone else. How does this now register in your mind? The fact that God is love?

The fact that God has loved sinners like us, that he loved us with the kind of love that sent his son, that he loved us with the love that sent his son to die, to die the death of the cross, to die though he himself is perfect, sinless, spotless, and to die for the likes of us.

I know we speak about characters that we find in our society, come across them, and sometimes they're described as even if they're up to no good sometimes, you find the description well he's a lovable rogue, or she's a lovable rogue, especially when they need attention to deal with some illness or whatever, and maybe they don't appreciate it and come across as something of a character, nurses will describe well so and so, he's a lovable rogue.

there is no such thing in the whole congregation of sinners as lovable. And it's not because we are that God loved us, but because he is love.

[30 : 39] What is your response? Have you loved him in return? Have you come to receive his gift? Has the Son of God come into the world and taken our nature and died the death of the cross and endured the wrath of God and yet you're not saved?

You haven't accepted him. You haven't said, Lord, how can I refuse this gift? How can I live a selfish life any longer? God, I know the quality of your love, when I know the extent of your love, when I know that it's the likes of me that you came to save and to love?

There's the fact of it, God's love, that he has loved us, but let me ask of ourselves as Christians, all of us who confess to be converted, to be God's people, where does this register with us?

Are we taking it with us so that we apply it in terms of our love for one another? Are we determined? Are we constrained? Are we compelled to love one another?

Not just because it's something we have to do, not just because it's something commanded but because the love of God constrains us. Because we are under obligation to the love of God to love one another and to show that love in the exercise of it as God showed it toward us.

[32 : 09] Let there not be anybody who says I don't need to love my fellow Christians or I don't need to love so and so because they're so unlike me and because they're so unlikable and because there's things about it that I find difficult that I find really difficult to accept.

What about yourself? When God loved you couldn't he have said that about you? Couldn't he have said how can I possibly love such and such a person?

They don't love me. They despise my ways. They're not bothered to obey my word. God loved us.

Because that's what Romans tells us, isn't it? When we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son.

This is how God's love is shown to us and how it was demonstrated. Thirdly, the fact that God's love is shown in our love. Here's a remarkable verse.

[33 : 13] 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, when you go back to John's Gospel this reminds you of I'm sure of words that you find at the beginning of John's Gospel. In chapter 1 of the Gospel of John you find the words you find at the beginning of verse 12 here.

No one has ever seen God. Or very similar words in verse 18 of John chapter 1 No one has ever seen God. Then he goes on to say the only God or the only begotten is another possible translation who is in the Father's bosom is probably better than at the Father's side in a sense.

He has made him known. What is he saying there? He is saying no one has seen God at any time. But Jesus, his son in him being sent forth into this world he has actually made him known.

And the word there is I think we've come across it before in looking at that verse it's a word which means exegesis. Taking out what you do in preaching the meaning of a passage you bring it out and you make it clear.

[34 : 23] That's at least what we're trying to do. And what that is saying is the heart of God the bosom of God the side of God where the Son of God eternally was the love of God has been made clear.

How? In the Son himself coming into this world he has made him known he has made him clear. Then you see the Son is no longer in this world physically.

Jesus has gone back to heaven. Jesus has been glorified. Where then are we going to see God if we saw him in the person of Jesus himself when he was in this world? How are people now going to see God?

Well John's answer is he's using the same language no one has seen God at any time. If we love one another God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

These are remarkable words. What a saying basically is this it's something we would never really almost dare to say if it wasn't written in scripture. God is put on display.

[35 : 29] God is brought out. God is made visible if you like. Though you cannot see him per se in himself he's made visible when his people love one another.

It's showing God to the world. It's showing the quality of his love to the world when we love one another. And even more remarkably the final part of the verse his love is perfected in us.

How can something that's perfect be perfected? Well the word of course means not just perfect in the sense of flawless which the love of God is it also means completeness in some passages.

And if you take that with you it's still a remarkable thing to say his love is made complete in us. That is in our love for one another. God is displayed in the love that we are to have for one another.

God is made clear in that to the world. That's the tragedy isn't it? That when God's people don't love each other and fall out and have all kinds of bitter disputes against one another it interferes with God being made visible and known to the world.

[36 : 49] God's love is made perfect. God's love is perfected in us. It's really in a sense the crowning of his love because this is really what God's love always set out to achieve and will achieve perfectly in heaven but even in this life that God's people will love one another.

What is heaven? It's a place where God's people love one another perfectly among many other kinds of descriptions. but this is if you like God's love made complete coming into its own God's love really just coming to this final exercise of it in the way that God's people by his love are unable to love one another.

What a remarkable thing that is. Tonight we have a means of showing God to the world as God's people. We have a means of showing God's love to the world and it's especially in our love for one another and all that that entails in the giving of ourselves to one another in consideration of one another above ourselves in thinking of others better than ourselves as Philippians 2 puts it because that's really what God's love is about a love that gave in order to benefit us and how little in return is it that we should love one another.

May God bless these thoughts on his word to us. We're going to conclude our service now singing Psalm 133 we'll sing the sing psalms version of it tonight Psalm 133 on page 175 how excellent a thing it is how pleasant and how good when brothers dwell in unity and live as brothers should for it is like the precious oil poured out on Aaron's head that running over down his beard upon his collar spread like Herman's dew upon the hill of Zion it descends the Lord bestows his blessing there the life that never ends.

Page 175 the whole of Psalm 133 How excellent a thing it is on time spent on how good when brothers dwell in unity and live as brothers should and live as brothers should for it is like the precious oil poured out on Adam's head that running over down his fear upon his collar spread upon his collar spread like air monster upon the hill of

[40 : 26] Zion it descends the Lord bestows his blessing there the life that never ends the life that never ends zou Amen from him Go to the man and ever more Amen Amen.