

God is Love

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. It's good to see you all. Thank you for your prayers as we were on vacation. It is good to be back with you all, and it's a joy to be back in fellowship.

I do just want to echo Tyler's. Our partnership with I Heart New Haven has two things going on right now. Particularly, I Heart New Haven is coming up in two weeks, and it is a wonderful place for us to live out the call to love one another, to love our city, and to love the brothers and sisters who fellowship in other churches.

It's a time of gathering and then service in the city, and so we'd love to. If you haven't signed up for that, you can sign up. If you get our weekly email through that, or if you can go to the Bridges of Hope New Haven website.

And also, I see this bucket over there. Backpacks. We're still collecting stuff. Spondin, are we still collecting stuff? So, still collecting stuff to give to kids, so they'll have supplies to go back to school. So, if you'd like to be a part of that, Dan can help you with that. So, I think that is all that I needed to say.

[1 : 14] And so, the Beatles sang a song a long time ago. All you need is love. All you need is love. All you need is love.

Love is all you need. Right? Love is one of the most central, fundamental human dynamics of history. Right?

It is an impulse, a desire, a need. It is something that affects absolutely every one of us. Great literature is filled with love stories.

Love for country, love for others, love for family. Love in many, many different ways. It is one of the most characteristic things about being a human being.

And it is one of the most characteristic things of what Christianity has always been about. When I first came to faith in Christ in high school, I was introduced to a short worship song.

[2 : 15] They will know we are Christians by our love, by our love. They will know we are Christians by our love, based on the words that Jesus said to his disciples in John 13.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another just as I have loved you. You also are to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

We think as well of Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount in chapter 5 where he says, You have heard it said, you have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

So love is fundamental to the Christian faith. It is central. But maybe you have tried to love someone.

[3 : 20] Your brother or sister, your sibling, your family, a difficult parent, your spouse. The people who are closest to you are often the hardest people to love.

But then we also find all the really annoying people in the world who don't conform to our desires, who don't serve our needs. And we realize if we're self-aware how difficult it is to love, I would challenge you.

Try to be loving to everybody perfectly for the next week. Then come back and report. We'll have a little talk. Maybe my sermon will be more useful after that than before.

But here we go. It's really hard. Sometimes we have moments where we can show great love, even heroic, sacrificial love.

But to continue in love, to press on in love, to love in the big and small. How hard it is. 1 John speaks to this this morning.

[4 : 27] Helping us understand how the gospel shows us dynamics of love that empower us to be those who love one another.

We're going to look at the passage in 1 John chapter 4, starting in verse 7. I forgot to look up the page number. Someone have it in the Pew Bible? What? 9.61?

Great. 9.61 in the Pew Bible. 1 John chapter 4. And as we look at this, I do want to give you a sort of warning up front. We are not going to learn how to love as in what does it look like.

This is the shape of it. If you want some of that, Pastor Nick preached on this two weeks ago. So go back to our sermon. Go back to our website. You can listen to that sermon. It will give you a bit more of what does it look like to love.

This is going to be more about how is it that the gospel can fuel our love and enable us to actually be loving in the way that God calls us to. So, with that, let's read our passage together.

[5 : 29] 1 John chapter 4, starting in verse 7. We'll read to the end of the chapter. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God.

And whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

In this, the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us.

By this, we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testified that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

[6 : 39] 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 the love that God has for us.

God is love. Whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment.

Because as he is, so also are we in the world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar. For he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.

Let me read that again. Let's get this right. If anyone says, I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar. For he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.

[7 : 54] And this commandment we have from him, whoever loves God must also love his brother. Let's pray and ask for God's help as we read this word together.

Oh, Lord Jesus, we thank you this morning for the privilege and the joy it is to gather. Lord, we thank you for your word. Lord, that in it you have revealed yourself to us.

And Lord, you have shown us not only your nature and your character, but Lord, also you have instructed us on what it means to be your children.

And Lord, what it is to come to faith and a restored relationship with you. God, I pray this morning for your help. Lord, I ask that you would help me, that my words would be clear, that I would speak what I ought.

And Lord, that I would be faithful to your word. Lord, I pray for all of us that we would sit under your word. And Lord, that we would receive it today from you.

[8 : 57] Oh, Lord, be with us now, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Friends, the message of our passage this morning is not rocket science.

It is not difficult. It is simply this. God's people love because we know his love for us in Christ. Now, we're going to unpack that, hopefully, and make that more meaningful.

But it's, there it is, right there. The command is very clear, right? It's framed. The passage is framed in verse 7 and in verse 21. Love one another, right?

We are to love one another. We must love one another. Verse 11 says, we ought to love one another. Verse 20 even ratchets it up a little bit to say, if we say that we love God, but we don't love our brother, we don't love our brother who we can see, who is in the flesh, who we can actually interact with, then we cannot say that we love God.

It is incongruous for someone to say, I am a follower of Jesus and I love God, but I hate people. God commands us to love one another.

[10:17] And what John does here is give us an understanding of the dynamics, the gospel dynamics of love, so that we can understand and appropriate these things and live out the command that he's given us.

If you're taking notes, here's your outline. There are three sections. Verse 8 through 10, we're going to talk about God being love. Verses 11 through 16, we're going to talk about abiding in God's love. And then in verse 17 through 19, we're going to talk about the power of God's love for us. So let's look at these in order. Verses 8 through 10, God is love.

This is what we see in verse 8. As we look again, anyone who does not love does not know God. Why? Because God is love. One of the most profound statements in the whole scripture, right? It's not merely referring to his actions, but it's referring to his character and to his nature. It is not just that he loves in action, though he does do that.

[11:23] It's not just that he values love, that he thinks it's important, but that he is love. It is fundamental to his nature and his person. And as the creator, he is the fount from which all love originates and all love flows.

This is why humanity throughout all the ages has always talked about love. Because God created humans in his image. And because he is love, one of the most fundamental descriptors of who he is, then we as human beings know that there is love in the world.

And though we always mess it up, we know that it's meant to be there and good. Because as his creation made in his image, we know this creator who is love.

And he is the origin of it. But we need to think a little bit more carefully about what it means for God to be love. Because in our culture today, there might be all sorts of things that we think of when you say God is love.

You might think God is tolerant or just God is nice. Weirdly, you might think God is an erotic or a sexual being, which some people have taken over history.

[12:38] Right? So there are lots of different ways that our culture might use the word love that the Bible doesn't. And on top of that, we see that when it talks about God being a loving God in the scriptures, there are different aspects or different ways in which he shows his love that sometimes can be confusing if we don't think carefully about it.

This is so helpful. All right, little books. So two books by one of my seminary professors, a guy named Don Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* and *Love in Hard Places*.

This is three lectures about the nature of God. This is five lectures about how we live it out in hard circumstances. They're free to the first people come to me after service because I'm giving away. They're great. Part of what he argues in this is that when you look carefully into the scriptures, God's love is not a simple thing, but it is a complex thing. And so God has a love, for instance, among himself in the Trinity.

The Father loves the Son just as the Son loves the Father. That's what he says in John 5.20.

There's another sense in which God loves, he has a providential love for the entire universe.

[13:57] As the creator, he loves everything that he has created. So he sends rain on the wicked as well as on the righteous. He lovingly upholds the world. We see this in places like Matthew 4 or in Acts 17, right?

It's also true that God has a particular inviting, seeking, saving love for his fallen world. And so one of the most famous verses in the Bible, God so loved the world that he sent his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

But then there are other ways where God talks about a special choosing love that he has for his own people. So in Deuteronomy 7, God said to them, it is not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all people.

But it is because the Lord loves you. And in independence and out of his own initiative, he loves his people in a unique and saving way.

And then, even within that, with his love for his saving people, there is a sense in which God's love is conditional based on his obedience.

[15:17] God loves his obedient children in a special way that is not shared with all of his children in the same way. So in 1 John chapter 3, it says, If anyone has the world's goods and sees his

brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

So we need to think carefully, because if we confuse these things, we see that there are some places where, in some ways, God's love is for all people.

In some ways, God's love is particularly for his special people. There is a way in which God's love is unconditional for all of creation. There is a way in which God's, or for the elect, but there's a way in which God's love is particular for obedient children, and so on and so forth.

If we collapse these together, we get really confused, and then we become disappointed, because we thought God was loving, and then he's not loving in all the ways we think he ought to be. God is not confused in his love, but he is complex, and it depends on his context, how he expresses his love.

That was a freebie. It's not what John is talking about this morning. What John does, right after he says, God is love, he then goes on to say, how do we know God's love?

[16:49] Look with me again in verses 9 and 10. How do we know God's love? This way. And the reason why this is so important is because we always, as humans, struggle.

Because we ask, how can God be a loving God if, and we look at a circumstance in our life. We look at something going on in the world, or we look at something in our own lives, whether we're suffering, whether we have unmet hopes or desires, whether we've suffered loss or trauma.

These things make it hard to see God's love. And that makes sense. Don't want to, like, belittle those. Those are not unimportant questions or important processes to work through.

But what John does is says, if you want to know where to look, to know with absolute confidence that God is love, here is where you can look.

Verse 9. This is how God's love was made manifest, that is revealed, made known, so that everyone can see it. God sent his son into the world so that we might live through him.

[17:59] God's disposition for us is that we would not die in our sin and fallenness, but that we would live through his son. And so his son came to bring us blessing and life in a renewed spiritual relationship with him.

Verse 10. This is love. Not that we loved God, but that he loved us. And in a particular way, he did it. He sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Now, if you were here earlier this summer, I already did this, but I'm going to do it again. Again, propitiation, this is your 25-cent theological word. What does it mean? It means to satisfy the justice and the wrath of someone against evil.

The wages of sin is death, according to the Bible. God hates sin because all sin is evil. We think that's a good thing until we have to say, I'm a sinner too, and then we think it's a terrible idea.

And we think, no, no, no, I'm not really that bad. But all sin is evil, and we need it to be judged, and we want it to be judged. So God comes, and he says, I love you, and I want to rescue you from your predicament.

[19:10] And so I'm going to send my very son, and he's going to be the substitute in your place to take my wrath, to die in your place, taking my judgment upon your sin.

This is how we know that God loves us. The Father gave his Son for us. The Son willingly obeyed and came and laid down his life for us.

His love is a disposition towards us that is shown in this unchangeable action that is costly and sacrificial to him.

God is love. So how does this help us with the hardships of life, the question I raised earlier? Well, I'll share personally about this.

When my father died without professing faith in Christ, I wondered, God, where is your love in this?

[20:27] And when I looked at the circumstances, I thought, I don't know. But I could look at the cross, and I knew that if God loved me and God loved the world so much that he sent his Son, that my God would not be unjust to my dad.

And I could trust him that his loving care, I don't know if my dad is saved. I don't have any reason to believe that he would be. But I've come to have peace that God showed love even to my dad.

It's the same place that I went when my first wife was diagnosed with cancer. It's where we went to look. When everything else went gray and flat, and it felt like there's so much in our circumstances where it would be so easy to say, God, how can you love us if this is what we have to walk through?

But we looked, and there was the cross. And we're standing there. And Jesus went there for us.

And I know from that that he loved me, and he loved us.

And he came that we might have life. And it was this that carried us through my wife's illness. And even in the last days of facing death, it was his love shown in Jesus that gave us hope.

[22 : 10] So we don't look at our circumstances. We look at the cross, and that's where we know that God is love. Having said this then, in verse 11, John reminds us, if we know this God who has loved us, we ought to then love one another.

We ought to abide in his love. And this is the next section in verses 12 through 16. Abiding in the love that God has for us. And abiding, this is living a life, the life of love is a life of vital relationship with God.

Abiding is a word you've probably heard. It's translated in various places. Remain, to continue, to stand firm, to continue to live in. You remember, Jesus uses the image of a vine and a branch. Right? So a tree branch abides in the tree by staying vitally connected to it. If it is broken off, if it is disconnected, then the branch dies.

Right? And this is what Jesus uses as a picture for us abiding in God and abiding in his love. But what John does here is take it one step further and he says, our vertical relationship with God is also then, therefore, affected by our horizontal relationships with one another.

[23 : 36] So verse 12, look with me at it. No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, not love God, but if we love one another, God's love abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

And that perfection, just so we're clear, is not, it means that we love perfectly. The perfection here is that it means that God's love is having its final or intended effect upon us.

Right? When God's love is perfected in us, it is shown because we love one another. And that's one of the purposes that God has loved us for, so that we might then turn and love one another.

And John is painting the picture of this as an abiding way of an ongoing living relationship with God where we stay in touch, where we stay connected to one another.

Right? Now, I'm not going to get into all the logic. Verses 13 through 15 is John pulls some threads from the rest of his book to just say, oh, by the way, this vital relationship with God, it's not just love.

[24 : 50] We might have a danger of thinking, well, then, anybody who has any loving act, that means they're a Christian? No, because they also have to have the Spirit of God in them.

Tyler preached on that last week, having discernment about spiritual things. It also means confessing that Jesus is the Son of God. And this is what we see in verses 13 through 15.

So these things together make a weave of what it looks like for us to have a real vital relationship with God. And remember, if you haven't been here before, John is writing this book to a church that is threatened by those who had been a part of their fellowship, but then had departed.

And in departing, they had started teaching other things. They'd been teaching, Jesus is not God's Son. They had been teaching that they had the Spirit in a particular way, and they were looking down on others.

And it seems that they were saying, I can love God and not love other people. It sure feels like when you read this letter that that was something that these people were teaching.

[25 : 56] And so John is writing this not to condemn our hearts, but to encourage us. Because when we hear this word, if God has loved us, we ought to love one another.

When we love one another, then God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. Some of you are thinking, oh no, because I know my cold heart.

I know what a terrible lover I am. And I don't mean that in a romantic sense. I mean, I'm bad at loving people. I recognize how selfish, how cruel, how inconsiderate, how self-protective I can be. How can I stand on this? But John, look, if the Holy Spirit is doing that in you, praise the Lord that He's showing you some places for you to grow.

That's not a bad thing. But what John is writing, saying, when you deny that you should be loving, when you deny that you have any, when you throw off any responsibility to love people and say, that's not my job, I just love God and do whatever I want.

[27 : 07] you can't say that and be a real Christian. You can't confess that. And so if you're saying, I'm a struggling lover, that I'm not very good at it, praise God that the spark of God's love is in you and press into it and let it take more and more effect in your life.

That's how John would want us to hear this. Where there's signs of love, cling to them, cling to Jesus and be assured in these things.

This then leads us into the final aspect, which is there is a power that God's love brings to enable us to love one another. I believe this is what verses 17 through 19 is talking about.

Let's look at this together. I'm going to reread this because it's important for us to hear the words again. By this is love perfected with us so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment. Because as he is, so also are we in the world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

[28 : 23] We love because he first loved us. John's saying we have a confidence when we see love, but then he takes it in this slightly odd direction because he'd been talking about loving one another and then suddenly he's like, the thing about this is that there's a judgment behind it, right?

He says, I don't have confidence in God's love just because I see him providing for me today. I have confidence in God's love because at the last day I will be able to stand before him confident.

Because as he is, that is as Jesus stands, obedient and righteous in the world, so also we stand in this place of safety because Jesus' death and resurrection has taken away our sin and therefore the fear of judgment.

This is what God's love shows for us. Brings us into a place where we don't have any more fear of God, but instead we have confidence to go to God because of his loving nature and his loving work so that he can accept sinners like us.

But here's how it empowers our love for one another. This is the amazing thing. He says, perfect love casts out fear because when we have God's love in us, we sit in Jesus and that protects us from God's judgment.

[29 : 59] But I think that there's more to it than that. He's also saying that perfect love casts out the fear that you have in your relationships with one another.

I think many of us live in a fear of judgment and it's ultimately rooted in having a fear of God's judgment for us, but it creeps into our hearts and into our relationships with others so that we fear their judgment as well.

We have a fear of what you think of me and what you think of me. And when we live in that fear, it begins to control us.

And when I'm afraid of what you think of me, then what do I do? Well, I do image management. I do self-protection. I seek to use you.

When I'm insecure in God's love for me, I will then look out and say, you must love me so that I can feel secure. That's not love. That's not love.

[31 : 02] That's not love. That's using people. But when God's love comes to us, when we are secure in His love for us, when we know He loves us, we don't have to spend all our time thinking about ourselves.

That security that we know from God allows us to then love one another. And this is the picture that I think verse 19 helps us see.

We love because He first loved us. He comes to us and fills us with His love and establishes us in His love so there's no fear of judgment, no fear of rejection, no fear of death.

And when we don't have those things controlling our hearts and our relationships, we then are able, for the first time, to love others without selfish motives, without ulterior goals.

We are actually able to love others the way God has loved us. And this is the power of God's love for us.

[32 : 30] It frees us from the fear of judgment so that we can, in the security that we sit with God, reach out to others and love them with God's love.

It's a pretty amazing thing. He fills up the well of our hearts with His love so that it overflows to those around us and cascades.

And this is what you see. This is what you see in healthy Christian community when there is a love that comes to one another. This is partly why I became a believer because I saw the love that some of my Christian friends had for one another and I said, I don't know what it is that you have, but I want it.

And it's because they were secure in God's love and so they were able to love me and others in a way that I'd never seen before. I came to know that they were Christians because of the love that they had for one another.

And so, friends, John gives us this command. We are to love one another. And it's rooted in the nature of God and in our relationship with Him where as we appropriate and take in His love for us, it then allows us to love others in the way that He calls us to and in the way that He Himself loves.

[34 : 04] what is the application of this? Friends, we need to meditate on God's love. Not in the modern self-help way of we need to meditate on God's love to think I'm cute, I'm smart, and dang it, people like me kind of way.

It's not that that's what God is saying to us. It is simply saying God loves us and as we see His love for us, as we take this in, as we, because you know what it's like when you forget about it, right? When you forget God loves you, you suddenly become afraid, you become insecure, you become, whatever it is, whatever your choice of control is, you'll do that.

But when God loves us, so we need to meditate on this, we need to think of this, we need to say it over and over again. It's why when you come here, we constantly are talking about God's love for us in the gospel, because this is how we know that God loves us.

We're about to sing these songs, a closing song with this as its chorus. Oh, the everlasting love of God, it shall ever be my song, so immense and free, more than life to me, the everlasting love of God.

[35 : 34] This is the love we know, this is the love we sing of. So friends, as we go from here, I pray that you may know the love of God.

If you're here this morning and you've never placed your faith in Christ, know that He loves you and He calls you to submit to Him and put your faith in Him and receive His love, the love that sent Jesus on the cross to die for you.

If you've been a Christian forever, remind yourself of this truth. God is love. And from this, friends, may we be the kind of loving community that God calls us to be.

Let's pray. Lord, we have touched on things that are too great for us this morning. Lord, your love has got a height and a depth and a width and a breadth that we can never fathom to the depths of it.

Lord, it is greater than the ocean. Lord, we praise you. We praise you for that. And we praise you for the greatness of your love.

[36 : 47] Lord, help us. Help us to know your love. And in knowing your love, help us to be those who love as you have loved us. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.