

Once Again: Love One Another

1 John 4:7-12

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Note: This sermon began with a video, "What Is Love", produced by Samaritan's Purse. The first four centered/italicized lines in the manuscript are quotes from that video: [Opening: Samaritan's Purse Video](#)

"Love is like over a 'gillion' stuff"

"Love is helping people."

"If we show people love, then they can spread it all around the world."

"Because Jesus did the same for us."

I'd like to think that the Apostle John -- who is often referred to as the "Apostle of Love" -- would agree with these kiddos that love is indeed all the things they shared in this video, and much, much more.

Throughout our study of this letter, we've seen John return to the topic of love over and over again. The word "love", translated from *agape* -- which includes such meanings as graciousness, lovingkindness, empathy, and sacrifice for others -- is found more than 30 times within the brief five chapters of 1 John...including 13 times in just the six verses we'll be studying together today.

Love is absolutely essential to the life and character of anyone who claims to believe in the one true God and follow His Son, Jesus Christ. John declares this and specifically commands us to love one another in our passage for this morning, 1 John 4:7-12:

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

1 John 4:7-12 NIV

We must love one another, like God loves us, to show and share with the world what it really means to know Him.

In v7, John repeats a command that by now should be very familiar to us all: **Christains must love one another.**

He's already brought this up several times in his letter, so much so that his original readers (and us too) might be thinking: "Okay John, we get it, love is great and you want us to love each other...what more could you possibly say on the subject?"

It turns out...quite a bit! In vv7-8, John lists three reasons we, as followers of Jesus, must be committed to loving one another.

We must love one another because...

1. Love is from God...and, in fact, God is love. (vv7-8)
 - a. This is a profound, reality-changing statement. John is offering us a glimpse into the true nature and essence and being of THE Holy God. We worship THE God who declares that -- right alongside His being Light, Truth, Spirit, Holy, All Powerful, Eternal, Glorious, and more -- one of his defining characteristics is love.
 - b. Therefore, if we want to be proper image bearers of God (which the Bible tells us is what we were created for), if we want to show the world what God is really like...then we must be people who, like our God, are characterized by love; in thoughts, words, and actions, ESPECIALLY in our interactions with the people around us.

2. Love is the best evidence we have of truly being born of God (born again). (v7)
 - a. *Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God*
 - b. I think the most common question I hear from my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ is this: How do I know I have really been saved? How can I be sure my faith is real?
 - c. It's an understandable question to ask, and no one should ever feel bad for wondering about it. After all, most of us didn't experience the ground shaking or the clouds parting when we confessed our need for Jesus to forgive us of our sins and our desire to follow Him. It is only natural to want some sort of assurance that your faith is real and that your salvation is secure.
 - d. John understands this. So he offers a pretty simple diagnostic: do you love one another, and is that love growing? He didn't come up with this measure of faith on his own. He learned it directly from Jesus. In the Gospel of John 13:33-35, we can find Jesus assuring his disciples that love is indeed an indicator of their good relationship with God: *34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*
 - e. If you believe in Jesus and you're willing and able to love other people like Jesus does...then be encouraged: the Bible says that's all evidence of your faith transforming you exactly as it should.
3. On the other hand, John also tells us that an unwillingness to love or a lack of love for one another is an indicator that something is seriously wrong.
 - a. *Whoever does not love does not know God...*
 - b. If you do not love the people around you and are unwilling to work on doing so, you cannot know God. It's that simple and that blunt.
 - c. This statement often brings a hard question to the forefront of our hearts and mind: "so...who counts among the "one another" -- who is it that we must love?"
 - d. This is a great big question that has both a very simple and a very complex answer.
 - i. The simple answer is this: "one another" most definitely includes your brothers and sisters Christ. We are all called to love our fellow believers, locally in our own church community and globally as the worldwide family of God. John wants us to prioritize and cherish and work on our love for our fellow believers.
 - ii. And whether you choose to justify it here, or using other scripture, "one another" will ALSO include loving those who are not Christians. This is why, at Faith, we are committed to making disciples of Jesus who Love God, One Another, and Our Neighbors --INCLUDING our neighbors who are not believers.
 - iii. (If you've joined us this morning as someone seeking to learn more about God and Christianity...we're very glad you're here and hope you feel like this is a safe place for you to ask questions and connect with others!)
 - e. The complex/complicated part of loving one another is figuring out what to do about people who are not loving toward us...and, in fact, might be dangerous or even abusive for us to be around.
 - i. Diving deep into this issue is beyond the purview of this passage, so I can't spend a lot of time on it, but I do think it's important to say a few things real quick.
 - ii. I would argue that more often than not, Christians should still strive to love someone even if that someone is cruel or even potentially harmful for you to engage. We are, after all, called to love our enemies.
 - iii. Part of what our love for others makes us willing and able to sacrifice is our safety and security.
 - iv. And it is entirely possible that the power and example of our love toward that person might be part of what they need to spark a change in their own life. The display and sharing of love with another person is one of those things that can cause transformation. It can introduce them to the loving God, perhaps for the first time.
 - v. HOWEVER...there are circumstances -- especially when someone is actively and intentionally abusive toward you or using their power to harm you or keep you or someone you know in danger -- where love may be darn near impossible to achieve.
 - vi. I want you to know that in that sort of situation, God understands. He understands that you are suffering injustice, he understands that the situation may be so broken that love cannot happen at that time, and he understands that you may need to withdraw and allow others to love you by speaking up, offering protection, and holding the person or persons responsible, accountable.
 - vii. The command to love one another should never be used to trap someone in abuse or allow someone to continue abusive behavior at the expense of a believer's loving patience or fortitude.

- f. We should all strive to love one another, and sometimes learning to do so will be a process or a journey, but we must do so with wisdom, discernment, and an awareness of the difference between patience and permissiveness.
 - i. If you ever find yourself in a relationship where you need help navigating something like this, PLEASE reach out. We, this church, want to be here for you.

Coming back from that little boondoggle, we can sum up vv.7-8 like this: We must love one another, because love is from God. It's one of His defining characteristics. If we want to be known as the people of God, then we have to be known as the people who are absolutely committed to loving one another. That's the simple arithmetic of Scripture: if God tells us to do it, we should try hard to do whatever it is he told us to do.

We must love one another, like God loves us, to show and share with the world what it really means to know Him.

So...what will this love look like? How do we go about loving one another? John tackles this question in vv. 9-10:

*9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.
10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*

These two verses redefined my understanding of love over the past week of study. Because there is something quite profound and quite beautiful here, if you take the time to notice.

The command John gives in v7 is to love one another. And then, curiously, he says almost nothing about these "other" people we're supposed to love. John very clearly lays out a definition, example, and standard of love in vv9-10...but doesn't say a thing about finding something in another person to feel good about or be drawn to. John's understanding of the love we share with each other is not based on or born from something about ourselves. Instead, our motivation for love is founded on God's perfect love for us, put on full and wondrous display in His Son, Jesus.

Like the kids in the video at the beginning, humans are very good at coming up with some really sweet and wonderful ways to love each other. But they pale in comparison to the example of true love God gave to us.

- God showed his love among us...meaning he came to us, personally, to live and breathe and eat and laugh and cry and love alongside us in real, incarnational life.
- He sent His One and Only Son out of the perfection of Heaven and into the muck of this fallen world so that we might truly live -- no longer condemned to death by sin, but made truly alive by grace through faith in Jesus.
- He did all this WITHOUT FIRST RECEIVING LOVE FROM US. God gave himself to us before we ever knew or understood how badly we needed the gift of His presence or peace.
 - In fact, God loved us while we were still His enemies; resistant, rebellious, and consumed with our own vain attempts at personal glory.
- And that love went way farther than simply spending time with us or helping us live better lives. God's love is redemptive, at great cost. Jesus was sent -- knowingly and intentionally, and willingly -- to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. To answer for our disobedience. To die in our place so that we could all have a chance at eternal life with our loving God once again.

This is radical love, unleashed. This is a kind of love the world cannot fathom, replicate, or come anywhere near imitating. Think about the way love is often talked about in our society. Think about how, compared to what we see in vv9-10, how devastatingly low the bar is for love in the world around us. Love is something that can be marketed, commodified, and turned into cheap entertainment. Love, the world tells us, is whatever we want it to be. Love is feeling, emotion, passion, and most important of all...satisfaction. And it fails to be any of those things...throw it away and try again.

No, says 1 John. No, says God. Love, biblical love drawn from the example of The Holy God who is Love, ***is the willingness to give up yourself for the sake of another.*** Love is sacrifice. True love is learned at the throne of God, at the Cross of Christ, from our knees kneeling next to the water as we wash the feet of another. Love is the willing and humble sacrifice of our lives for the people around us. Just like Jesus commanded in John 15:

12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

John 15:12-13 (NIV)

The question we have to ask ourselves is this: when we seek to love one another, is our love based on what someone has done for us, how they have treated us, what they might do for us, or even how we generally feel about them...or does it flow from our understanding of God's love for us and for them? Are you willing to love someone solely because God loves them, and loves you?

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Now, I don't think we'll get this kind of love perfect every time. To be honest, I'm not even sure we'll have a very healthy average. But one of the truly beautiful things about following Jesus is that it's okay to be on a journey where you learn, grow, and get better at being a disciple. You can be just okay at loving one another today, and work to get better at it tomorrow. You can even stumble a bit, seek forgiveness from God, and keep moving forward. Learning to love like God loves us is a lifelong commitment, but one that is most definitely worth it. Because something truly amazing happens as we expand our willingness to sacrifice for the sake of others:

11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

1 John 4:11-12 NIV

"No one has ever seen God" seems like an odd, out of context comment for John to make at this point. But I think he's trying to help us understand how our love for one another may be a kind of proof or evidence of God to those who are seeking Him. Because the truth is that although God is "wholly other" -- he's not human, not part of creation, but instead is above and outside and sovereign over all creation -- He has ALWAYS wanted to be close to us. To communicate with us. His desire has always been to have a good relationship with us, like he expressed in Jeremiah 30:22: *"You will be my people, and I will be your God."*

The story of the Bible is, in some ways, the story of God working His hardest to deal with our sin so that we can be together with him. He created the world, he established a nation, he visited in tabernacles and temples, he spoke through prophets, he counseled kings, he took on flesh and walked side by side with us, he suffered death in order to break its power over us, and now His Spirit lives within those who call upon Him.

And it is this indwelling Spirit that makes our act of loving one another in imitation of His love for us even more important. God may not be seen in the form of physical flesh and blood, but he CAN be seen in our response to Him. By loving others in the radical, self-sacrificing way of Jesus, we show the world a little bit of what the God who dwells within us is like. Our love for each other and our love for others is, in and of itself, a testimony to the Gospel: the Good News that there is a God, and that He's ready to share his love with the world.

He will do so with us and through us, and in doing so His love is made complete: He loves us, we learn to love Him, He directs us to share this love with others, who in turn learn that they are loved by God, and they love Him in return, and share that love with others...and the Gospel of salvation moves forward in the hearts of men, women, and children around the world.

Love is indeed, "...like over a 'gillion' stuff", but it is also absolutely and without question the precious gift and very essence of our good and loving God.

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So, in light of all this, three questions I'd encourage you to think about, pray about, and talk about with your friends and fellow believers this week:

1. ***Do you have a healthy understanding and appreciation for the truth that God loves you? Do you really believe that He does?***
 - a. Because remember, our love for others begins with God's love for us. If you don't really connect with the idea that God loves you, then this is where your work begins.
 - b. Ask other believers about their experience with God's love.
 - c. Pick a Gospel to read and pay close attention to the way Jesus (who is God) loves the people he encounters.
 - d. Maybe start working on a list of ways you recognize God's love in your life.
 - e. Trust me, it is worth the time and effort to seek out a beautiful and brilliant understanding of God's love.
 - f. Do you have a healthy understanding and appreciation for the truth that God loves you?
2. ***Who is it that you struggle to love?***
 - a. If you have relationships that are broken, I think it's important to know that it's not God's will for them to stay that way.
 - b. If you are at odds with a brother or sister in Christ in such a way where your love for each other is hindered, then it needs to be a priority for you to work on that relationship -- HUMBLY, and with a willingness to listen, compromise, share your pain, and confess your own wrongdoing.
 - c. If you struggle to love people of a particular race, ethnicity, political affiliation, social status, gender, intelligence, or any other sort of qualifier...remember that God chose to love you without qualification. (And you don't get to have different standards than God)
 - d. You have got to do the hard work of seeing and valuing people the way God sees and values people.
 - e. That doesn't mean you pretend things like differences or even sins don't matter...but it does mean your commitment to love is stronger than your commitment to disdain or disregard.
 - f. This morning, if you know there is someone in your life you struggle to love, then I beg you to please commit to praying for yourself and for that person, and to seek God for guidance in how to repair the damage in your heart and relationship.
3. ***Who do you know that needs some love?***
 - a. Who needs you to pick up the phone and call them just to check in, chat, and make sure they are doing alright?
 - b. Which neighbor's whole outlook on life might be changed if instead of seeing you dash in and out of your house everyday, they saw you walking up to their door and saying hello?
 - c. Who needs you to take some initiative and drop off a dinner, or invite them over for coffee, or ask them to join you for a walk around the park?
 - d. Who needs you to be praying for them? Who needs you to be bold and offer to pray with them?
 - e. Which of your brothers or sisters in Christ needs you to sit and listen to their pain, their worries, or their fears?
 - f. Who among you today needs to be brave and vulnerable and let someone in this church know that you need a loving word and a caring prayer?

I can't tell you who in your life needs some love...but I bet if you took a little time to think and pray about it, it wouldn't take long for you to make a list.

So instead I will challenge each and every one of you...take the command to love one another seriously. Make it a priority. Shape your life around this calling. Be bold enough to share your love, and be humble enough to both ask for it and receive it from others.

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends...”

“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another...”

We must love one another, like God loves us, to show and share with the world what it really means to know Him.