

The Source of Love

a sermon in the series
Life in the Son

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I John 4:7-12

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.

This is the Apostle John's third time to command the churches to love one another. It is that important that he repeats it again and again. We will find this is not the last time he commands them to do so. It's so crucial for the glory of God, for the evangelism of sinners, for the unity of the church that Christians love one another. When we love one another it is, at the risk of sounding melodramatic, the greatest opportunity for the church to demonstrate the Gospel.

I. THE DIFFICULTY TO DEFINE LOVE

I want to direct your attention to a difficulty John no doubt is experiencing, and it is certainly my experience this moment, the difficulty to define love. John begins verse seven saying,

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.”

Christians are to love one another for the very fact that they are Christians. That's what he says here. Because you are a Christian you are to love others. Well, the objection is given: everyone is supposed to love, not just Christians. Yes. In fact, not just Christians can love. Even non-Christians can. Even Jesus said the ungodly could love those who love them. He acknowledged they have the ability to love. What John is saying is that Christians are to love like God loves. Quite a bit different, isn't it?

As we have gone through these commands to love, starting in the second chapter, we have no doubt felt incapable to love like God. Who among us today can say *I love like God loves to the degree God loves?* None of us would dare say that. So today John is again going to show us that while you and I might not perfectly love like God we can nonetheless love like Him. We can love with

a God-kind of love.

If you are to love like God, then we need to ask a question: what is love? Don't you think that's appropriate? If we are to love we ought to know what love is so we can distinguish whether or not we're doing it. It's too important a command to miss. He's already repeated it three times and will continue to do so in the remainder of the epistle.

A few weeks ago I told you love is the ability to treat someone whom you don't like as if you do like them. In other words, love is the act of your will to put the need, the concern, and the interest of someone else ahead of your own. We see this repeated in Romans 12 and Philippians 2, "Let this mind be in you which was also be in Christ Jesus." There we see He did not esteem Himself better than anyone but He put the interests of others ahead of Himself and His own self-interests. The problem is—it doesn't tell us what love is, it tells us what love does. So how would you define love?

Well, you could answer the way John does and say, "God is love." That would be right but it wouldn't define love. It tells us who God is and what He's like but it doesn't tell us what love is. You can't turn and reverse it and say "God is love so love is God," because there are some kinds of love that are not God-like at all. I love chocolate! But there is nothing divine in my love for chocolate.

How do you define love? I think at this point we cover our mouths and walk a little bit softer because we're at a breaking point. Truthfully, it is hard to understand the very nature of love. God is love, that tells me something about His essence, but what is this thing called love?

Even though you and I are struggling to define love this morning John says he won't leave us guessing as to what it looks like. He may not be able to define it for us, but he can tell us what it looks like. Paul does the same thing in the great love chapter of I Corinthians 13. He tells you what love does, what it isn't and what it's like, but he never really gets to the heart of what love is. So John directs our attention this morning to the very source of this kind of love: God Himself.

II. THE DIRECTIONAL FLOW OF LOVE

John shows us how the love of God flows and how it affects that which it touches. I've been laboring in this epistle with a compulsion to reword the word order and the clause order. I don't know if you noticed that a few weeks ago. I had some of you question me about it. John wrote it this way and I flipped it and reversed the order in the clauses. I discovered this week why I have felt a compulsion to do so. I think analytically. I think more logically. I think in logical syllogisms—a propositional statement followed by a minor thesis and that brings you to a concluding statement, which is the fact. John doesn't think that way. Paul the apostle does and I can understand Paul much easier. But John is a poet at heart.

One of my commentaries brought this out and I saw why I've been having this problem. John has

been writing as a poet and I've been approaching it as a logician. There is definitely a beauty and an art form in the writing of John. It is poetic, but since I think in a more analytical fashion, here's what we're going to do. We're going to read these two verses in the way they logically flow. We're not changing what John's saying but we are changing the order in which he says it so you can get the point. If you don't do that you'll have your heart thinking it's your love for one another that leads you into the love of God, not vice versa. So, let me begin with the premise that drives what John is trying to say.

A. God is Love.

There is the fountainhead of you and I loving like God. It starts with God.

"... for God is love." (1 John 4:8)

Again, we are not dealing with an attribute. Don't confuse this. This is not an attribute like holiness or goodness or justice or mercy. I do not believe love is an attribute of God, rather I believe it is describing the essence or nature of God.

There are three things in the Bible God says He is: light, spirit and love. All three are referring to the essence of His being. Not necessarily what capacities He has as far as omniscience or omnipotence, those are attributes of God. Love is dealing with who God is at His very core. And at the center of His being He is love so every one of His attributes becomes a demonstration of that love. Yes, even His justice—even hell. Friends, we have a lot of work to do in our theology so we do not paint in the sinners' minds an objection that says a God of love cannot send a sinner to hell; if He did He wouldn't be a God of love. Oh, no sir! It's because of His nature of love there is a place called hell. It's very simple. If God is as loving as He claims to be He cannot forever allow sin to do what it wants to do. There has to come a day of reckoning. Justice is an act of love not an act of unkindness.

B. Love Comes From God.

Look at verse 7b. I've divided the verse up into three parts, a, b and c. Look at the middle part:

"... for love is of God ..." (1 John 4:7b)

So love comes from God because God is love. He has to demonstrate that love. Well, that presents a problem, does it not? Wasn't there a time when God existed by Himself without angelic creatures to witness His love? Man was not around to see the love of God either. So what does love do for all eternity? This God who is love must love, but to whom does He express love? The answer is quite simple: God loved the Son and the Son loved the Father and the Father and the Son loved the Spirit and the Spirit loved the Father and the Son. This proves the Trinitarian nature of God because love has to demonstrate itself. To whom was there to demonstrate that love for all eternity? The fellowship of the Trinity. The Father loved the Son and it's the same Son that

prays in a prayer on Golgotha, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Eternally loved by the Father and now cut off from that loving fellowship.

C. God’s Love Gives Life to Christians.

“... everyone who loves is born of God and knows God ...” (1 John 4:7c)

God is the fountainhead of love. Therefore love comes from Him and it comes to whom? We who have believed upon Him. And that love transforms us, changes us, and gives us new life, so the life I have as a believer is not me merely turning over a new leaf. I haven’t gone through a metamorphosis, a change by my own reckoning, or doing, or power. No, I have been transformed. Something has happened to me. And it’s happened to you if you are a Christian—the love of God has touched you, sir, and you therefore can never be the same again.

D. Christians Should Love All Other Christians.

We’re at the beginning of our text, thus illustrating that John writes like a poet. He’s not concerned with the logical order, he’s trying to convey his heart, how he feels as the Spirit of God is moving upon him.

“Beloved, let us love one another ...” (1 John 4:7a)

Here is the directional flow of God. Although John begins with a command, God is love and therefore must be the source of all love and that love is given to you and me and transforms us. Therefore, because God has loved us, we ought to love one another.

III. THE PROOF OF GOD’S LOVE.

A. Love is Manifested.

“In this the love of God was manifest ...” (1 John 4:9)

Again, because God is love, He has to manifest it. Love is not something you can hide within the confines of your own heart; love has to be expressed. The Bible says God demonstrated His love toward us (Romans 5:8). Love is always manifested and thank God it is. There are some today who need to see the love of God for yourself afresh and anew. Your heart is weary today and burdened with many troubles and cares. What’s the answer? The problems being solved? No, although that would be nice. What you need is to experience God’s love for you new and afresh. Why did God allow the problem in the first place? So He could manifest His love in and through the problem. The very opposite of the way we think and work.

Joseph is sold into slavery and then purchased as a slave by the guard of Pharaoh, Potiphar. Things seem to be going well and then what happens? Potiphar’s wife tries to seduce him, but Joseph

will not cave in to her temptation. Instead he stands for righteousness. In retaliation she has him framed, arrested, and thrown into the inner prison. And yet, there in the inner prison, God was at work in his problems, manifesting His love not just to Joseph, but also to his family whom Joseph would eventually save. All of the difficulties were preparation for one day to be called before Pharaoh as an interpreter of dreams and promoted to second-in-command. The 13-year journey from age 17 to 30 was all the demonstration of the love of God.

It's always wonderful when love is an emotion you can experience. For example ladies, sometimes you long for your husband to treat you the way he did when he was courting or dating you. Yes, sometimes you do and say, *I wish I could feel that love that way, like it was then.*

The love you felt in courtship days is nothing more than a manifestation of sentiment and emotions. Real love is loving somebody when they don't have their hair combed or their teeth brushed or their makeup on and you are still willing to sacrifice for that person who has just acted unlovely. That is love. My friend, when you are going through the most difficult hours of your life, do not be deceived to think God is not involved in it. The very thing that is happening to you right now is God demonstrating His love toward you. How could that be, you ask.

God is more concerned about what you are becoming than how comfortable you are. And God knows there are things in your life, and my life, that is keeping you from knowing Him better. Now what's better for me: To know God more intimately or to be more comfortable in my life?

If God is love then it has to be to know Him better. It's the pressure and the difficulty that exposes these parts of my heart that I have refused God. God manifests His great love for us by allowing the difficulties to urge us to Him.

B. Love is Manifested in a Person.

"... that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world ..." (1 John 4:9)

Now why does John use the terminology "only begotten"? John calls Jesus the very same in John 3:16, *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.* Why doesn't he say, "His Son"? We would have known it was Jesus.

Why does John like to use that terminology? It's because of what He says in 1 John 3:1, *"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God."* God has more than one son; He has many sons and daughters, but there is only one begotten of the Father. In other words, of all God's children there is one who is superior and preeminent and it is Jesus Christ. The One who was with Him in eternity past who is God and was with God. This same "Word became flesh and dwelled among us and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father." The love of God is manifested in the person of Jesus Christ. That's why some of you who do not know Christ do not know the love of God. You cannot fathom that God loves you. You don't know Jesus, for Jesus is the manifestation of that love. Let me see if I

can explain it to you as John does.

C. God's Love is Manifest to Those Who Hate God.

"In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sin" (1 John 4:10).

So what does John tell us about the love of God?

God's kind of love loves those who don't love Him. God's kind of love loves those who don't love Him in return. That's the good news this morning, for all of you today. That God loves you. Even though you do not return that love to Him, He loves you nonetheless.

You say, *I don't understand. I've heard you say this stuff about Calvinism or election and this doesn't seem to jive.* Well, friends, don't worry about that. Let me make this perfectly clear to you—God has greater capacity than you and I to love. He can love all of His enemies and has chosen to do so. I agree with my hero Spurgeon, that God's love and salvation is so powerful that if He wanted to save 10,000 worlds the blood of Christ Jesus is enough.

So I say to you today personally, please listen to me: God loves you. This is the kind of love that He has. He does not love those who first love Him. No, His love goes to those who do not love Him! He cares for those who have no concern for Him. His love is manifested to persons who have rejected His love time and time again. You say, *That's me. I've done that. Is it possible that I can so reject the love of God that He no longer loves me?* You can reject the day of salvation, but you cannot reject the love of God. For God is love.

God's love doesn't wait to be loved it takes the initiative. In other words, God is the pursuer. God is pursuing us. The love of God takes the initiative and that is what we have sung about today. We worship and praise God that God pursued us first.

Not what my hands have done can save my guilty soul.

It's the love of God. For God demonstrates His love toward us in that while we were sinners Christ died for us. God pursues us in the person of Jesus Christ. Friends, the Father sent His Son into the world for you.

God's love sacrifices for those who do not love Him. Not only does He love you and have a heart for you, but He has sacrificed Himself for you. This is the Gospel. Please just let me take a few moments to tell you something you already know, but may God open your understanding and allow you to see into the realm of His own heart so that you can be captured by His love today. The Bible tells us that every single one of us were so lost in our sin that even God was our enemy and we wanted nothing to do with Him. Even good religious people are in the same predicament as people who are out on the streets, the prostitute or the drug addict. Both are rejecting

God in their own way. One does it in a religious fashion, the other in an evil fashion. Both are lost. Therefore God has said this is your heart. You want nothing to do with Him. The Bible says of us,

*There is none righteous, no, not one;
There is none who understands;
There is none who seeks after God.
They have all turned aside;
They have together become unprofitable;
There is none who does good, no, not one.
Their throat is an open tomb;
With their tongues they have practiced deceit;
The poison of asps is under their lips;
Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.
Their feet are swift to shed blood;
Destruction and misery are in their ways;
And the way of peace they have not known.
There is no fear of God before their eyes. (Romans 3:9-18)*

And the Bible says this of us all, "For all have sinned and come short of His glory" (Romans 3:23).

Yet in light of this incriminating evidence against us, what does God do? He does not do what He did to Satan and those who joined with Him, who rebelled in heaven. He turned them away without the opportunity for repentance. The Devil can't get saved today. But when you and I in the heat of our hatred with a clinched fist shaking in His face, God sacrificed His Son for us. In all of the days of your life up to this very moment, God has shown you nothing but loving-kindness and mercies. He has bestowed upon you the warmth of His own soul. He has shown you nothing but goodness and yet your fist remains clinched. Now tell me sir, tell me if God doesn't love you?

Someone asked the question the other day, is there any advantage to a child who grows up in a Christian home and in a Christian church? Yes. Here is the advantage: the manifestation of the love of God. He or she gets to see God's love in a way that someone who hasn't grow up in church never gets to see. But with that advantage comes greater risk.

Many of you young people are of that number that has been given this advantage, but what have you done with it? You have refused God's love. Yet, in spite of all your excuses and accusations, God has still not retracted His offer of love this morning.

God sent His only begotten Son, made with a physical body and subject to the same problems as any body; pain, sleepiness, and weariness. Subject to the same burdens of human life. He was "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," says the Word of God. Jesus knew sorrow like none of you have ever known sorrow.

One day, after having healed the sick, opened blinded eyes, unstopped deaf ears, and even raised

the dead to life, wicked men took Life itself and killed it on a cross. It was the greatest statement of rejection in all humanity. And what was God's response? You hear it in our Lord's prayer on the cross, "Father, forgive them." Isn't that amazing love? While His hands are stretched out and nailed to timber, He is reaching out to those who put Him there. Can you argue against the love of God today? How can you dare doubt His love? How can you reject it?

D. L. Moody, famous evangelist in the 19th Century, told the story of a father who had a prodigal son. It's a true story. The boy sent his mother down to an early grave. She grieved herself to death over her son. One evening the boy started out as usual, to spend the night out drinking and gambling, his old father, as he was leaving, said, "My son, would you please spend the night with me? I've been so lonely since your mother has died and you have not spent one night with me since then. I want you to spend your evening at home with me. Won't you gratify your old father while staying home with me tonight?"

The young man said "No. I'm out of here. There is nothing happening here. Nothing interests me. I'm going out."

The old man prayed and wept and at last said, "My boy, you're killing me just the way you killed your mother. These hairs are getting whiter and you're sending me to the grave."

Still the boy wouldn't turn around, he continued to the door. Then the old man said, "If you are determined to go out, then it will be over my dead body tonight. I cannot resist you. You're younger and stronger than I am, but if you go out you must go out over this body."

Then he threw himself before the door. That young man had the boldness of a self-centered heart to walk over his father's body and trample the love of the father under his feet. D. L. Moody after telling the story said, "That is the way of the sinner. You have to trample the blood of God's Son under your feet to go down to death, but whether you do or not He loves you still."

If you being evil know how to love your children how much more does the Father love? That's what the Father wants you to know. He is love and loves you by sending His Son to be the propitiation, the sacrifice that will remove all your evilness, all your hardheartedness. Every rejection you've ever made will melt away like snow on a hot summer day. It will be gone if you only open your heart to the love of God.

IV. THE SOURCE OF CHRISTIAN LOVE

"Beloved, if God so loved us," shows the source of Christian love. Christians' love for God and their love for each other is really God's love for them. That's what John is going to now show us.

A. God's Love For Us Motivates Our Love For Each Other.

"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." (1 John 4:11)

Those who are believers have been kissed by the love of God. With the kiss came the same nature of love deposited within you. God's love is transforming. You can love your brother, even the one who has despised you. You can! God's love is in you motivating you to love. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Here again is the logic for you. The logic is if God can love His enemies, then surely brothers can love one another. It's a command, therefore it means it's not automatic. I don't want you to think that it's easy to love all the time. It is certain people. There are those who are very easy to love. They have great hearts and exude love. Then there are other Christians who are more like a repellant. They're not always pleasant. They're not always easy to get along with. But John does measure love by temperament. He doesn't deal with the easy Christian or the more difficult. He simply says because God has loved you, you ought to love others. If God can love you, then you can surely love your brothers, even the difficult ones.

There is a disposition here that must be acted upon. The love of God for me, and in me, is a disposition that I now have as a Christian. I can love with a God-kind of love but there are four things I think I must do in order to love others who are acting unlovable:

1. When injured by another I must first see myself.

When someone does something hurting to me, I must first see myself. Why do I say that? Well, let me illustrate. Perhaps they lied to you. Have you ever lied to someone? You say, they're not treating you fairly. Okay, but have you ever treated someone else unfairly? *Well, they don't respect me.* Okay, have you ever disrespected someone? Friends, when somebody mistreats you, the first thing you need is to remember who you are. You are capable of as much sin as that person who has just sinned against you. You need to remember your own sins and your own capability and how easy it is to lose your temper or to say something hurting. Remember your own tendency to become self-concerned, self-absorbed, self-conscious, and self-conceited. See yourself.

2. When injured by another I must see them as a victim of Satan.

I need to feel pity for a person when they injure me because they're being used by a demonic power. I need to understand that this person is a victim of Satan. That doesn't mean they don't have any responsibility but they have been deceived just as Peter was. Do you remember what happened to Peter as he grabbed Jesus by the arm and scolded Him for talking about dying? And what was Jesus' response? "Satan, get thee behind Me." Jesus acknowledged Satan had deceived Peter and was using Peter to get to Christ. What do you think is happening to you when someone mistreats you? When someone treats you the way you think you don't deserve? They are a victim of the enemy's deception. Remember that. Feel sorry for them. Pity them rather than react against them.

3. When injured by another I must see the love of God for me.

I must think about how I have sinned and yet God loved me. I must remember that He loved me first and gave His Son for me when I was wicked. Recall, dear friend, the Lord did not reject you; He embraced you. We have sinned much since Christ has saved us. Therefore, remember when someone sins against you how patient and merciful God always is. That's what John is saying here.

4. When injured by another I must commit myself to the One who loves me most.

When you are wounded by someone, you need to remember that God your Father is sovereign over all things and He allowed it to happen as an act of His love and mercy to do something in your life. You need to trust God. When you begin to respond that way, do you know what will happen? Verse twelve will happen.

B. God Will Be Seen In Our Love For One Another.

“No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another God abides in us and His love has been perfected in us.” (1 John 4:12)

God is not seen with the human eye. He is a spirit. However, He is visible in the actions of His people. When Christians love one another it is the love of God being demonstrated. That is exactly what Jesus said, “By this all will know you are My disciples if you love one another.” Now listen church, I want to talk to Christians before I conclude. This is the command of God to you and me. We are to love one another. There ought not be a single person in this room whom you hold any ill will, disdain, or disrespect in your soul for. I know that seems difficult but I believe John is saying today all difficulty to love a brother or sister melts away in light of how God has loved you.

Beloved, how much more important it is that we love one another. It's not just our reputations that are on the line, it's God's reputation also. God has put it into your and my hands, this thing called love and He is saying to us *the world will only know My love through you and how you treat one another*. I am convinced beyond all argumentation that if this church will refuse to hold grudges against people and forgive, God will be made visible. Let us become proactive in our love, looking for opportunities to love one another—especially that quiet person in the corner. Let us love in tangible ways that impact lives. I'm telling you, then we will be successful in our preaching about the love of God. Our love will give power to our witness and our testimony. For in it the love of God is manifested.

Are you a person who has yet to experience the love of God? Then I say to you today, there may be another who could explain it more eloquently and more clearly than I, but there is no one who can say it more earnestly—God indeed loves you! He wants you to experience His best for you. When you love somebody that's what you want—their best. God wants His best for you. Reject it no longer, open your heart to Him and be loved by God. Amen.