

God Is Love

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[0 : 00] If you're there in 1 John chapter 4, beginning in verse 7, would you please stand with me as we honor God's word together.

! 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. May God add a blessing to the reading of His word. Would you please be seated? I remember seeing this picture.

[1 : 29] It was a cartoon that I either saw in a high school sociology class or a college psychology class. I don't remember which.

But the picture depicts two men who are standing apart from one another, but they're facing each other. And in between them, on the ground, is a number.

From one man's perspective, the number is a six. But from the other man's perspective, the number is a nine. The point of the cartoon is to tell people that they are free to interpret symbols based on their perspective and that both perspectives are true.

Seems wise until you apply the same logic to real life. If two people are looking at the same word or symbol and have opposing views, the first thing they should do, if possible, is to contact the author, the person who wrote it or put it there, and ask what they intended.

If that's not possible, then they should seek to understand the word or symbol by looking at other words or symbols that surround it.

[3 : 00] For example, if you saw the numbers five and seven on either side of the number in question, then that means it's a six.

If the numbers were eight and ten, then the number in question would obviously be a nine. Or maybe the number is in front of something, like a building.

And if you orient yourself to face whatever that symbol is numbering, you'll be in the right position, you'll have the right perspective to understand the author's intent and what they meant.

The author's intent in context determines meaning. This is true when listening to a teacher giving instructions.

This is true when reading directions on a medicine bottle. This is true when following the speed limit on the highway. This is true when you pay taxes. This is true when you read emails and text messages.

[4 : 07] For example, just this past week, our staff went out to lunch to celebrate Heather's birthday. And I got a text message from my son, Jack.

On my phone, when the screen is locked and I receive a message, I can see the person's name and I can see the first couple of lines of text in that message.

So my phone is on the table and a text message pops up with my son, his name on it. And the text says, I got the king with a whole bunch of exclamation marks after it.

And I'm thinking, what does this mean? And I'm quickly in my mind trying to decipher the message. What kind of king did he get?

Well, it can't be a person because there are no kings in Bartlesville or kings that live in Bartlesville. So he couldn't have kidnapped King Charles or something like that.

[5 : 10] I also know my son and I know my son doesn't play chess. So this probably doesn't mean that he's just captured a king on a chess board.

What do I know? Well, I know that it's lunchtime. And I remember Danny, my wife, saying that she was going to take our kids' McDonald's for lunch.

And McDonald's has been selling these, I call them adult Happy Meals, that come with a toy. And the toy is a Chicken McNugget Buddy.

When my parents were in town this past Christmas, we all got these meals that had several different, they have several different McNugget Buddies that you can collect.

And this was really nostalgic for me because these were the kinds of toys they used to put in the Happy Meals when I was a kid. And so we kind of made it, you know, jokingly our goal to try to get all of the different McNugget Buddies.

[6 : 13] But the one we didn't have and the one that we wanted the most was like the mayor of McNuggetville or whatever it's called. I'm not sure. And so I'm putting all of this together in my mind as I'm grabbing my phone and thinking, what could this mean?

And I'm thinking, well, he probably got the mayor or the king or whatever of McNugget Town. And sure enough, as I open the message, my interpretation of the message was correct because with the text came a picture of the guy, whatever his name is, that we were looking for, the king of McNugget Town, Jack had gotten him.

And the reason I share that story, the reason why I bring up the importance of authorial intent in context to determine meaning is because our text today contains a statement within a verse that has been misused, misapplied, and misunderstood by many because they've ripped it out of its context and they have sought to understand the author's intent and meaning, or they haven't, I should say, and instead they have put it within their own.

And the statement that I'm talking about in our text this morning is the three-word statement, God is love, which appears in verse 8 of this chapter and later in verse 16.

Remember last week we looked at John's warning, the verses right before these ones, his warning about false teachers and how we are to test them and what they say against our Bibles, against God's Word to see if what they say matches what we read in Scripture.

[8 : 00] And in our time, there are many such teachers and they use the statement, God is love, out of context to approve things that God forbids.

Additionally, many unbelievers are familiar with the statement, God is love, and they use it out of context to criticize and to scold Christians whom they consider unloving because they don't support or affirm their lifestyle or choices.

We live in a culture that tells us love is love. We also live in a culture that prefers that we not define words, but instead those words be left open for individual interpretation until or unless your interpretation of something like how you define love conflicts with whatever popular opinion is, in which case you'll be called names and canceled.

Now, there's more I could say about that, but what I want to focus on this morning is what John, inspired by the Holy Spirit, meant when he said, God is love and what that means for us.

The earliest God is statement that John makes in this letter is found in chapter 1, verse 5.

[9 : 42] Let's look at that. This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you that God is light. God is light.

And in him, there is no darkness at all. In the Bible, light is associated with truth. And darkness is associated with all that is untrue.

So right off the bat, John is saying that God is the source, the originator of truth. God is the one who defines truth.

He is light. He is the essence of what is right and good. It's God's definition, God's truth that drives our understanding and ability to comprehend, then, what it means that God is love.

And this is really important. Because as believers, we are commanded to love like him.

[10 : 50] In Matthew 22, 35 through 40, Jesus was asked a question. It says, And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?

And he said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.

And a second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.

Loving God, loving others, this, Jesus says, is what it is all about. This is what he commands us to do.

But we can only obey this command if we understand love the way God, the source of all truth, defines it. Any other definition will lead people away from truth and further into deception.
[12 : 02] If your definition of love does not match God's, you're wrong. God is the author of truth and love.

To understand and to know what love is. And to love like him, you have to see it from his perspective and define it by his standard.

So the main idea for this morning's sermon is that God commands Christians to love like him. God commands Christians to love like him.

And in our text, John provides us with three facts about God's love. To know what love truly is and to obey God's command to love like him, you must accept these facts as truth.

To know how God is love, you must know first that God is light. And these three facts shed light on the truth of God's love.

[13 : 13] And they inform our understanding of how we are to obey his command to love like him. If you're an unbeliever and you're here this morning or listening to this message from home this morning, you might believe that love is love.

And that love is love. And that love can be defined without God. And I encourage you to listen to these facts, to listen to these words with an open mind and an open heart.

And I trust that God has a purpose in your hearing this message because he wants you to know what love truly is.

And so the first fact that John presents us about love and informs our ability to love like God begins with love's origin.

So the first fact that John talks about is love's origin. In verse 7, Beloved, let us love one another for love is from God and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

[14 : 27] So John says God by nature is love and thus he defines love. Love does not define him. And there's a specific kind of love that John has in mind here that our English language doesn't quite convey.

The New Testament was originally written in the ancient Greek language. And unlike English, they had four different words for love that captured different aspects of love.

For example, you might hear someone say, I love pizza or I love my friend or I love fall weather. You probably not hear anybody say they love winter weather, especially on a day like today. But I love the spring. Or they might say, I love the Sooners or I love the Cowboys or I love whatever my favorite team is.

Or they'll say, I love my spouse. I love my children. And they'll say all of those things. But you know that they mean different things with how they're applying the word love, that they shouldn't love all of those things.

[15 : 38] And they probably don't love all of those things in the same way. The Greek language better captures the kind of love we truly mean with four different words.

The first is *phileia*, which refers to the love that exists between close friends. This describes a deep bond between two people that is not sensual, but expresses gratitude and thankfulness for a person in your life whom you know that you can trust.

The second is *eros*, which refers to romantic love, passion, intimacy, physical attraction. The third is *storge*, and that refers to love between family members.

It's more of a protective kind of love, like a kid asking their mom in the car why they have to wear a seat belt and hearing their mother say to them, because I love you and I don't want you to get hurt.

The fourth Greek word for love is *agape*. And that is the word that John uses in this passage, and he uses it a lot in this chapter. It describes a love that is sacrificial and unconditional.

[16 : 55] It's a love of choice, a love that serves others with humility. It's selfless, and it's the highest form of the four loves in the Greek language that there is.

It's the supreme example of love. And this, John says, is the love that God is.

The love that he has loved us with when he saved us from our sins, when he gave us his life and his light, prompted by his sacrificial and selfless love.

Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3.16, For God so loved the world. This was his motivation. Love, *agape* love, that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

Ephesians 2, 4 through 7, we read, But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. [18:11] By grace you have been saved, and raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages, he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

It's the selfless, sacrificial love of God that saves us and transforms us in knowing that you've received God's love, not based on your worthiness, your goodness, or your attractiveness. That his love is not something that you earned, yet it is something in salvation you have received. That knowledge, John says, which resulted in your new birth, changes the way that you define and understand love.

It changes the way that you love others. It enables you to love others in ways you wouldn't have otherwise. And all of that is evidence that a Christian has truly been saved.

In salvation, God's life becomes your life, and God's love becomes your love. I like what John Piper said about God's love.

[19:31] He said, love is from God the way heat is from fire, or the way light is from the sun. Love belongs to God's nature. It's woven into what he is.

It's a part of what it means to be God. The sun gives light because it is light, and fire gives heat because it is heat. So John's point is that in the new birth, this aspect of the divine nature becomes part of who you are.

The new birth is the imparting to you of divine life, and an indispensable part of that life is love. The love that you have as a born-again person is no mere imitation of the divine love.

It's an experience of the divine love and an extension of that love to others. Now, all people are created in God's image, and despite their sin will reflect the love of their creator, but those who express it most vividly, purely, and truly are those who love like God, sacrificially, selflessly, and honestly.

I know who the people are who love me most in my life, and I know who they are because they are the ones who are willing to tell me the truth that I need to hear, not just telling me things that I want to hear to flatter me.

[21:05] If somebody is willing to tell me the truth, I know that that person is somebody who truly cares about me. And this is how we are to help each other from temptations in this life, in this world, to exchange the truth of God for a lie.

Ephesians 4, 14 through 16 says, So that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes.

Rather, as Christians in the church, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped.

When each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. So to summarize verse 7, John says we are to love one another like God and we can love like God.

Selflessly, sacrificially, purely, and honestly, because we know the love of God as experienced through his love for us, adopting us, forgiving us of our sins, not based on who we are, but on who he is.

[22:28] Then in verse 8, John issues a warning. Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love. If your life is not characterized by an understanding of God's love, a love that is pure, true, sacrificial, and selfless, a love that cares for enemies and prays for those who persecute you as Jesus did, then John says by logical extension, you don't know God because you have not been born again.

Your definition of love is not based in knowledge of the truth of who God is. Love has its origins in God and he is the one who defines it.

God is love does not equal love is God any more than the statement grass is green means green is grass. To obey God's command to love, you must understand that love has its origins in him.

In his love, he saved you through Jesus Christ, his son, which leads us to the second fact about God's love in this passage.

We saw love's origin, now love's demonstration. In verse nine, 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.

[24 : 11] So it's one thing to talk about love. It's something different to demonstrate it, to prove it by actions. The Christian God, the only true God, is a God who doesn't just speak, but who acts.

He is a God who does stuff. He is a God who serves. He is a God who gives. He is a God who sacrifices. I remember being a kid and I was with my friend and my friend was telling me about how much his dad loved him.

And he knew how much his dad loved him because his dad told him that he'd take a bullet for him. And I remember thinking, well, I know that my dad loves me.

And so as soon as I went home, that was the first question I asked to my dad. Dad, would you take a bullet for me? And I think he gave me this weird expression, like, why is that even going on in your mind?

But he told me, yes, I would take a bullet for you. And I was relieved to hear that, though I'm thankful that my dad never had to take a bullet for me. In no other religion, no other God, but the one true God, the God of the Bible, the God who is true, took a bullet, so to speak, for his children.

[25 : 39] Jesus left the glories of heaven behind, a place without sin, death, destruction, suffering, and lies.

A place where, as the second person of the Trinity, he experienced eternal communion, perfect fellowship, and perfect love with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

He didn't need to come to earth to receive love. He didn't come to earth because he was lonely. It was God's love, selfless, sacrificial love that motivated him to come to the sin-cursed, world, to enter into enemy territory, to be harassed, beaten, and eventually seized by those he came to rescue who nailed him to a cross.

Why did he come? John says he came so that we might live through him. Why was this necessary?

Well, the Bible tells us in many places how to answer that question, but I'm going to focus on one place or one book of the Bible, and that's the book of Romans for the answer to that question.

Romans 3.23 says, For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We have all sinned, every one of us, and we have sinned a lot.

[27 : 12] We've all lied. We've all coveted things that aren't ours. We've taken things that did not belong to us.

We've hated people created in God's image. We've done all of these things that have displeased our holy creator, and his standard is no sin.

No sin at all. Not even one. And so we all fall short. I've said this before, but it helps me understand. If we all went out into the parking lot and we had a contest to see who could jump up and touch the moon at night, or, you know, the moon is still there even when it's not night, but say that was the competition.

Who can jump up and touch the moon? Some of us would get closer than others, but we would all fall woefully short of the goal. And there are consequences for sin.

There is a consequence for failing to meet the standard. Romans 6.23, the beginning says, for the wages of sin is death. You see, all sin, all of it, ultimately is committed in rebellion against God.

[28 : 30] All sin is an act of treason committed against the ruler of the universe who has given us life. The consequence of disobeying a holy God is physical, spiritual, eternal separation from Him.

And you know what? That could be it. That could be it. That could be the end of our story. If God said, you know what?

Have it your way. You don't want me. You refuse to acknowledge me. Me who made you.

Me who loves you. Me who desires to have fellowship with you. I who gave you life. You don't want anything to do with me?

Okay. Goodbye. As our culture would say, you're canceled. God could have done that. And you must understand that He would have been justified to do that.

[29 : 46] But, let's look at Romans 6.23 in its entirety. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And Romans 5.8 says, But God shows His love for us and that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Jesus came and lived to die for us. He lived sinlessly. He overcame the traps, the lies that Satan always seeks for us to exchange the truth of God for.

Satan came to Adam and Eve in the garden and seduced them and twisted and denied God's word, ultimately tempting them to abandon God as a reliable source of truth.

They sinned, they fell, and all of creation came under the curse of sin. Broken fellowship with God produced broken relationships amongst people.

[30 : 59] Instead of loving Him, instead of loving one another, people mistreated one another, in horrific ways. And they still do.

Satan came to Jesus in the wilderness after he had been fasting for 40 days and night. This was before his public ministry. And he tempted Jesus by taking God's word out of context.

Christ. But Jesus could not be fooled. He would not exchange the riches of this world that Satan thought to offer Him without a cross.

At the end of his earthly life, Jesus knew there was a cross. But at the end of the cross, He also knew there was a resurrection. A final demonstration and validation that He is all that He claimed to be.

And His death was not for nothing. On the cross, He became the sacrifice, the propitiation, the appeasement, the atonement.

[32 : 11] He suffered in our place. He took the bullet. He absorbed the punishment we deserved to give us life.

How do we get this life? Again, in Romans 10, 9, we read, because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. It doesn't say if you confess Jesus and believe in Him plus, plus you never sin again, plus you have perfect church attendance, plus you have been baptized, plus you have taken communion, it's Jesus plus nothing else.

Like the thief who died next to Jesus on the cross as he realized with his final breaths that Jesus is the Son of God.

And he turned to Him and he said to Him, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And what did Jesus say to him? Well, you see, you've been really bad and it's too late for you now.

[33 : 39] I haven't seen you in any of my ministries. I haven't seen you take part in anything that I've done. It's too late. You need to do some stuff and there's no way that now, nailed to the cross next to me, you can do anything.

You've committed too many wrongs. Jesus didn't say that. He said to Him, today, today, today, you will be with me in paradise.

God's love is not based on what you must do, but trusting and believing in what God has done in love for you.

Romans 8, 38 through 39. For I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You know, I know I've said this before and I don't think that I've accurately explained what I've meant by you needing, us needing to preach the gospel to ourselves every day.

[35 : 08] This is what I mean. You need to remind yourself every day that the love you've received from God through Jesus Christ is a love that you never did anything to earn, but something that you've lavishly received from Him.

God's love for you was never based upon conditions. And it's in knowing how much God has loved you as demonstrated at the cross that your heart should be full, filled with love that desires to do stuff selflessly, sacrificially, purely, truthfully, like Him.

Beware of legalistic voices that would tempt you to believe that salvation involves Jesus plus something else. Beware of those who harp on the law more than they harp on God's love and God's grace.

In verse 10, John continues, 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.

Propitiation, that word, means to turn away wrath through an offering. This isn't the best illustration, but I think it's helpful.

[36 : 35] When me and my sister were young, we were playing and somehow thought it would be fun to play this game where I came as close to punching her face as I could with my fist without making contact.

And we were laughing and we were getting oh that was close, oh that was close. Well you know how the story ends, right? I nailed her. I hit her and she covered her mouth and she starts crying and she starts wailing and it wasn't long after she started screaming that we heard the footsteps of

my mother coming and I'm in shock because I can't believe I did it. I hurt my sister. I love my sister. I didn't mean to do that. And here I am with clenched fists standing over my sister who's on the ground crying with her hands over her mouth and my mom is on her way and my sister in between sobs stopped long enough to tell my mom he didn't mean to do it. He didn't mean to do it. Don't punish him. We were playing a game. He didn't mean to do it. She was in pain and she spared me the pain that I should have received. She interceded for me my victim not wanting me to pay for what I done but to be shown grace and mercy because even though I punched her in the face she loved me and she turned my mother's wrath away from me though I did get a very stern talking to.

[38 : 12] it's not a perfect illustration but I think it helps and I think though what John Stott said will help even more. He said it is God himself who in holy wrath needs to be propitiated.

God himself who in holy love undertook to do the propitiation in God himself who in the person of the son died for the propitiation of our sins.

Thus God took his own loving initiative to appease his own righteous anger by bearing it his own self and his own son when he took our place and died for us. Jesus lived the life that you and I should have lived and he died the death that you and I should have died so that God can receive you save you not based on your record of what you've done but based upon who he is.

Why did he do this? Love. God is love. He is the author. He is the originator of love and he's demonstrated it supremely on the cross.

[39 : 39] That leads us to the third fact that we need to know about love, God's love, so that we obey his command to love like him and that's love's perfection.

Love's perfection. God is the originator of love. Love is demonstrated supremely on the cross upon which Jesus died and now we look at how love is perfected.

verse 11. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another without qualification. John doesn't give any. Without condition, he doesn't give any.

If you don't love someone whom God has saved, how can you honestly say that you know God? If someone comes to you and offers biblical correction to you and they do it because they love you but you choose to get angry about it and hold that against them, how can you honestly say that you know God?

You know, maybe there's a conflict today that you need to end. Will you let love or hatred rule in your heart towards that person?

[40 : 56] maybe also you think that you're being loving by avoiding a conversation or an issue or taking a stance about something that you know is untrue, is wrong, is evil in this world and you avoid it because you want to feel comfortable and you don't want to make others uncomfortable.

Understand, Jesus did not mince words. Jesus spoke the truth. In love he spoke the truth. In love he selflessly gave his life to die to others.

How can you say you love God and have received his love if you don't love those he loves and refuse to show them the kind of love that he's been gracious to show you, refusing to forgive them even?

A divided church will not demonstrate and cannot communicate the true and pure love of God.

Verse 12, John says, so no one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

[42 : 18] God's love is perfected in us when the world, when others see us demonstrate Christ-like love to one another.

John's point is this, no one can see God in his essence, in this form and live. We'd be vaporized by his holiness.

But he says, people can see God, they will see God and how Christians love each other like Jesus. Selflessly, sacrificially, unconditionally, truthfully, forgiving each other, rebuking each other in love if needed, being there to comfort someone when they are suffering.

The world can show love, but the kind of love they show is not the kind of love that is in its purest, truest form like only Christians can.

[43 : 31] Because we know God's love. Because we know the depths of God's love as demonstrated on the cross. And God's love is perfected in us.

Sinful people who have been saved by his grace and who love each other, who suffer with each other, who suffer alongside one another, enduring each other, thus proving that we are different. And it's Jesus who has made all the difference. So how do we adjust our lives according to this passage? Well, it's easy. Well, it's easy.

love like Jesus. It's easy to write. It's another thing to do. Do you love like Jesus?

Selflessly, sacrificially, purely, honestly? I want to close my sermon with some things that Jesus said.

[44 : 36] In the upper room, when he met with his disciples, knowing that he was about to die on the cross, he said to them in John 13, 34-35, and he says it to you today, disciple, follower of Jesus Christ, 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. And then when he prayed in John 17, he said, I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.

And so now I hope and I pray that through God's word you understand what it means that God is love, that you will understand it in the right context now, that you'll do it.

And you can do it if you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. And if you don't, today is the day. You've heard the word, you've heard the gospel, and he is calling to you.

Will you come to him? Will you receive his love? Will you be saved? It's not based upon who you are or what you must do, but based upon who you understand and trust and believe Jesus to be.

[46 : 14] Knowing what he has done to save you. Let's pray. Lord, I pray that our prayer will be your prayer.

That we will, Lord, in obedience to your example, in obedience to your command, that we will love love like you.

That, Lord, we would be reminded of the gospel that has saved us. That we would never be tempted to believe, Lord, that your love for us was based upon something we did or something about who we are.

And that, Lord, we would not seek to love others the same way, only if they do certain things for us, only if they tell us what we like to hear, only if they are willing to do whatever to make us feel good about ourselves.

Lord, that's not what agape love is. That's not what it does. That's not how it looks. God, I pray for each of us that we would continually have the gospel preached to us by your spirit, that we would be reminded of your selfless, sacrificial, pure, and true love that has saved us from our sins.

[47 : 37] Lord, that we would be compelled then to demonstrate that kind of love in our church, in our community, and in our world, and that in so doing people would see, and what they would see is that the gospel is true.

Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is the way. He is the truth. He is the life. We ask these things in His name. Amen.

Thank you.