

GOD'S LOVE AND OUR LOVE, PART 1
(SUNDAY, JANUARY 6, 2019)

Scripture: 10 Commandments; 1 John 4:7-14

INTRODUCTION

Why does Scripture speak so much about love?

The reason is that the love that Scripture commands is not a natural action.

Since by nature we enter the world hating God it is only natural that we will hate others.

Because of our sinful nature we are naturally selfish and self-centered, and we love ourselves more than we love God and others.

And so, in OT Law and throughout the NT, love is illustrated and commanded.

In Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3, husbands are commanded to love their wives.

In Titus 2, young women are to be admonished that they love their husbands and their children.

Most of the commands regarding love are connected with the local church, the body of Christ.

If Christ showed His love in dying for His people, how can we be unloving to each other?

Now it is significant that we are not just commanded to love others.

Love for God is the primary command and duty.

The greatest commandment Jesus explained is to love God with all your heart, soul, and strength.

The second greatest commandment then is to love your neighbor as you love yourself.

Love is not simply being nice, though true love is a demonstration of great kindness and patience.

Love is not simply accepting everything about all people.

And love is not just given to those who deserve or who have earned love.

Love is sacrifice, care, and commitment, directed by truth in light of what Christ has done for us.

Love as God has loved you.

We will look at 1 John 4:7-10 this week and in two weeks, Lord willing, verses 11-14.

Next week I want to speak directly on some of the false doctrines that are spreading today, and then we will come back to verses 11-14.

1) LET US LOVE ONE ANOTHER, 1 JOHN 4:7-10

According to the outline we have been following, 1 John 4:7-14 is the **fifth main section** of 1 John.

Some would include verses 15-21 as part of this section dealing with love.

As I have stated, 1 John is a challenging book to outline and not everyone is going to come up with the same outline.

This section of 1 John can be considered John's greatest instruction on love.

As such, what passage written by Paul might compare to 1 John 4:7-14?

The answer is 1 Cor. 13.¹

There are some definite similarities between the two passages.

1 Cor. 13 was written in the context of spiritual gifts. The Corinthians did not properly understand spiritual gifts and this led to pride and division.

¹ Yarbrough, 230.

John's context is not the same, but we should ask, why does John speak of love at this point in his letter?

I think it makes sense in light of the previous instruction in verses 1-6 which deals with false teachers and their teaching.

Christians must be discerning.

We don't always put this into practice the right way.

And we can be discerning and fail in love.

Additionally, we can say, if godless spirits are at work, the other deeds of the flesh are not far behind.²

So, John properly glories in the message of the gospel and how it must be applied in our relationships.

In looking at the flow of 1 John 4 we also consider the word of encouragement and rebuke our Lord delivered to the church in Ephesus, which may have been the first ones to receive this letter also.

Rev. 2:2 "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; **3** and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. **4** Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.

Let us focus now on verses 7-10 in 1 John 4.

The relatively short book of 1 John speaks of love as a noun and verb about **51 times**.

Here in chapter 4 we have the third section in John's letter dealing with love.

There is reason for coming back to love again and here John gives a very deep theological basis for love connected with God's very being and His work of redemption.

² Yarbrough, 234.

We observe that verses 7 and 11 both begin with the noun, **beloved**.

This word is an expression of John's love for his readers and it also can be a signal of a new topic or a special call for his readers to pay attention to the subject matter.

Let us love one another.

While John is certainly not alone in speaking of love, John is the only NT writer to use this exact expression for our duty.³

Notice it is not given as a command.

Verse 7 is a call to action.

Verse 11 repeats this same call to action.

This call to love is then connected with the being of God. **God is the source of love.**

I stressed earlier that 1 John 1:5 and the phrase God is light is the core of all of 1 John.⁴

God's holiness is stressed by John.

God's love is also stressed appropriately by John.

We can say that "God's light takes visible shape when God's people reflect His love."⁵

Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

I have emphasized repeatedly that love is not the way to salvation.

It is not by *your love* that you are delivered from your sin.

John emphasizes here that the reason you can love is because you have been regenerated.

So, the source of love is not from your own resources or character. It flows from being born by God.

³ The exact inflection of this verb - 10x all by John (9x in 1 John and 1x in 2 John).

⁴ Yarbrough, 231.

⁵ Yarbrough, 231.

You now know God.

Now love alone is not a sign of being born of God.

We probably all know very genuine and seemingly loving people who are not believers. Their love and generosity do not bring about their own salvation even as they sometimes put to shame true believers.

What explains how unbelievers can show at least an outward display of love?

We all are created in God's image. And even the unbeliever knows what God expects.

Paul writes about this in Romans 2:15, the work of the law is written in the hearts of people who don't have God's written word.

Some use the term common grace. I don't necessarily think this is the best term, but God in His providence does use even unbelievers in His purposes.

Again, we consider the love that John and Scripture command is a love in light of God's love for us in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Verse 8 again gives a word of warning, a negative reflection of verse 7.

Those who do not love do not know God.

Why is this the case?

Yarbrough explains it this way:

God's communicable attributes, like light and love and truth (or faithfulness), are transformative. The person who receives Christ's cleansing from sin (1:9) and seeks Christ's mediation with the Father (2:1) has a relationship with the Father established by which the Father's traits increasingly mark the believer. For example, this relationship actualizes a will to obey divine commands (2:5) and follow Christ's example (2:6).

The end of verse 8 gives another very deep theological statement: **for God is love.**

Now it would be blasphemous to say **love is God**. Nowhere does Scripture indicate anything like this.

The ESVSB had a good note on this phrase:

“God is love” means that God continually gives of himself to others and seeks their benefit. There was eternal love between the persons of the Trinity even before the world was created (John 17:24), and God’s love is the ultimate source of any love that Christians are able to display (1 John 4:11, 12, 19).

It is wonderful to meditate on the fact that love is one of God’s central attributes.

Some foolishly would want to say that God’s only attribute is love.

Listen to a few passages of Scripture where God’s attributes or being are described in a way similar to 1 John 4:8.

Deut. 6:15 (for the LORD your **God is** a jealous God among you), lest the anger of the LORD your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth.

Psa. 7:11 **God is** a just judge, And **God is** angry *with the wicked* every day.

Psa. 73:26 My flesh and my heart fail; *But* **God is** the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Heb. 12:29 For our **God is** a consuming fire.

1John 1:5 ¶ This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that **God is** light and in Him is no darkness at all.

Just as there are some who downplay or ignore God’s other attributes because love sounds more appealing to the world, we must not downplay God’s love just because this precious attribute has been so twisted.

Our salvation and all the gifts we have been given flow from God’s amazing love for us.

In the OT, the main word that we have in Scripture that speaks of God’s love is the word **mercy**, what is sometimes translated as God’s goodness, steadfast love or His lovingkindness.

Recall the great request that Moses asked of God in Exodus 33 to see His glory.

What did God say to Moses about his request?

The Lord responded to Moses saying, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live."

But God did grant Moses the awesome experience of witnessing at least part of God's glory and presence.

We read in Exodus 34:6,

Ex. 34:6 And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth,

What should our response be to this wonderful truth?

Psa. 89:1 I will sing of the **mercies** of the LORD forever; With my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations.

Psa. 106:1 Praise the LORD! Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for *He is good!* For His **mercy endures forever.**

Both verses 9 and 10 begin with the phrase **in this**.

Some have suggested that in verse 9 we have the **goal** of God in revealing His love and verse 10 gives the **means** of God revealing His love.⁶

Together the two verses beautifully emphasize the greatest depth and expression of God's love for us.

As John Calvin points out the love of God towards us is shown in many, many ways, but what we have here is the greatest evidence of God's love to us.

God made the greatest example of His love clearly known in sending His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.

⁶ Yarbrough's outline.

When we study God's Word we see the beautiful unity and diversity God employed by using different earthly writers.

This is the only place in 1 John where John uses the verb *to live*.

But what a beautiful description of our salvation in Jesus Christ in being delivered from death.

In the midst of Paradise, God warned Adam that if he disobeyed in eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would surely die.

Do you remember Romans 6:23?

Rom. 6:23 For the wages of sin *is* **death**, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Jesus especially in John 5-8 spoke of life and true living.

John 5:24 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

And notice that the life that we have is a life in Christ.

Our entire spiritual life is now lived in union with our Lord.

In verse 10, John again gives an expression and definition for true love.

Here John states that God's love cannot be understood in terms of our love for God.

Why does John emphasize this?

I think what John is emphasizing is that God's love for us had no connection to our love for Him.

In fact, we know from Scripture that it was just the opposite.

So, God did not look and see that we loved him or even that we would love Him in determining to redeem us.⁷

God in His sovereignty and according to His love sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

This particular word translated as propitiation is used only by John and in two places: 1 John 2:2 and here.

Propitiation is a Latin-based word translating a word from Greek.

What does the Greek word mean?

It means to satisfy or turn away wrath.

I mentioned that many liberal theologians have rejected the idea of divine wrath being satisfied by our Lord on the cross.

We reject their unbelief and twisting of God's Word, but it is an amazing thing to consider that God in His love sent His Son to turn away His wrath.

Leon Morris wrote:

So far from finding any kind of contrast between love and propitiation, the apostle can convey no idea of love to anyone except by pointing to the propitiation. It is one of the NT's resounding paradoxes that it is God's love that averts God's wrath from us, and indeed that it is precisely in this averting of wrath that we see what real love is.⁸

What is the connection between verse 10 and the call to love in verse 7 and later verse 11?

John here does not make all the connections explicit but that doesn't mean that no connection exists.

⁷ See the comments of John Calvin here.

⁸ *New Bible Commentary*

Let us consider three points of connection.⁹

First, since our sins have been paid for by Christ, we are then freed from our own self-limitations and actually able to love others.

If you honestly examine your own lives, you see how selfish and self-centered we are.

Where is the power to love others? It is found in Christ and what He accomplished for us.

Second, Christ having died for us means even more that we can love Him.

We have talked much about loving others, but what about our love for our Lord?

Indeed, we must also confess that our love for Christ is often very weak or insignificant.

He died so that we might also love Him. He died so that then might obey what He has commanded us to do.

1John 3:1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!

Third, John has already given us a standard for love and sacrifice in terms of what we are to seek to show to others.

It goes way beyond just simple courtesy and respect, though it certainly should include them.

I emphasized 1 John 3:16 in a previous message; it is always good consider this verse.

1John 3:16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren.

Robert Yarbrough wrote:

Christ's costly propitiatory atonement uncaps an artesian well of selflessness in which believers find resources for sacrificial care for each other.

⁹ These three points taken from Yarbrough, 239. Yarbrough had four points. I have combined points two and three.

CONCLUSION AND COMMUNION PREPARATION

In the Lord's Supper our call is to do this in remembrance of Christ.

This is where our attention must focus.

We also rightfully then consider our own shortcomings in loving Him and loving others.

Consider where you fall short.

What would be a step or steps of repentance and change in your life?

Let us give all the glory and praise to our great God as we continue our time of worship.

Prayer

Hymn 359

BENEDICTION: HEBREWS 12:1-3

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.