

So why is the month of February identified with love? The most obvious answer, of course, is Valentine's Day, February 14, but this date was established by the Bishop of Rome named Galatius in the 4th century to commemorate a man whose name is anglicized as Valentine who died on that day. But he was not known for romantic love, he was known for his generosity and benevolence. Actually, it was only in the 14th century that this feast of Valentine came to be identified or associated with romantic love. It was popularized by the English poet Geoffrey Chaucer in the classic book *The Canterbury Tales*, where he makes reference to courtly love and love between couples. Now, there is nothing wrong if anyone or a couple wishes to celebrate the date as long as there is no religious mandate that is attached to it. It is when people try to impute religious significance to the date or to the feast that problems begin to surface. None is more problematic than when people speak of God's love for mankind.

It is perhaps the most popular thing there is concerning God. If there is anything people will say of God, if they acknowledge him at all, it is that God loves mankind. And probably no phrase is more popular in our day than the words unconditional love. That is the appealing idea concerning God's love for his human creatures. He loves them unconditionally. My message today is going to challenge that idea. But I understand why even well-thought Christians often use the phrase. In fact, even Reformed believers use the phrase because they conflate it or confuse it with the doctrine that is dear to us as Reformed believers, that which we call unconditional election. But let me explain the difference. When we talk of unconditional election, we mean that God from eternity past in his sovereign will has chosen among sinners. So all deserve that nation, but among them, God sovereignly chose those whom he will save through the Lord Jesus Christ. In that sense, it is unconditional. It is not because of works they have done, not even because of the so-called foreseen faith. It is not in anything grounded in man or what his condition may become, not because of his potential. God chose out of his mere good pleasure and it is right to call it in that sense, unconditional election. Unconditional love, however, understood by many is complete acceptance of man in himself, whatever he may be. Now, remember the difference. Unconditional election is without regard to what man is. Unconditional love is propounding the idea that God loves man for who he is, whatever his condition. And it has given rise to many abuses that one could sin with a high hand that is flagrantly and may still expect God to love him in such a way that he is still accepted unconditionally. And so it leads to the sense of self-importance before God. God cannot help but love us. That is the idea that is imbued in many minds. If anyone is in the lifestyle of sin, if your life is not under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, but you are taking comfort from the thought that God loves you unconditionally, or you may have been tossed and bred in the thinking that God's love for you is unconditional, please listen to this message. You need it because what is at stake is your eternity. And I would invite you to turn your Bibles to a familiar words. I mean, the passage is not familiar to many, but the words are familiar. That's 1st John chapter 4. I will read from verse 7 to verse 10 and somewhere there is probably the most familiar citation many could make of the Bible without knowing that it is from the Bible. 1st John 4:7-10.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love. In this, the love of God was made manifest among us that God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loves us and

sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins. Now, I think it is safe to bet that people who have the biggest idea of theology can at least say accurately, God is love. They may not know that it is from the Bible, and those who know that it is from the Bible cannot cite the exact reference where it is. And yet, many are very confident that this is the truth, that God is love. And perhaps that is the exclusive idea that they hold concerning their notion of God. But how do we know love? It is true that God is love. It is clearly stated that God is love. But we must remember that John is saying this in a letter where his intention is to give assurance, but assurance that is using evidences. Now, you can have assurance of salvation by the testimony of the Holy Spirit and by the promises of the gospel. Those are all components of assurance. But the third component is what John is insisting on, which is evidences of genuine saving faith. And what are those evidences? He cites several, but one of the most important that he repeatedly cites in this letter is that those who are truly believers, truly, truly saved and true believers, they love one another. So there is that love that bonds together believers in Jesus Christ. But how do we know love? John does not point to the greatest romantic love story to tell us what love is, not even an inspiring patriotic story of a hero who probably gave his life for his country, but he points to the love of God. And the question is, how do we ascertain the love of God? Is that something we can just assume as true to all in the sense of unconditional love? That is not the case. God's love has done something that is the point of John. Why Christians can love one another is because of what God has done and what God has done in love has produced people who are in love to one another. I draw there for this message for this morning:

**GOD'S LOVE GAVE CHRIST FOR SAVING DEATH,  
PRODUCTIVE OF BRETHREN, BONDED BY LOVE.**

God's love gave Christ as saving death, or like atoning death, productive of brethren, bonded by love. God's love for sinners is one of the greatest propositions of the Bible. If you are not thrilled by the thought that God loves sinners, you do not know what sin is probably you do not know what God is in his holiness. But if you know what God is in his holiness, and what you are in your sinfulness, to say that this holy God nonetheless loves sinners like us, it is one of the profoundest propositions that is made in the scriptures. But we must not think of that love as anything like human, not romantic love that is often sentimental, often emotional. God's love is different. Yes, John makes clear that God's love is prior to our love. God's love is not responsive. We are responsive to the love of God. It's not that we love God first, but he first loves us. But take note that what follows that is that God took action precisely because that love is not static love, it is dynamic, it needs to do action so that those whom he loves is going to are going to have that condition that will make them the true people evidencing the love of God.

What are the actions of God in this love? There are two that I want to emphasize. First, God's love pacifies his righteous wrath. God's love pacifies his righteous wrath. And the second is God's love produces his loving church. God's love produces his loving church. So the first thing then, when we think of God's love, you cannot think of God's love are right unless you connect it to the fact that God's love pacifies his righteous wrath. Now, this is the most distinct of the biblical pitching on God's love contradictory to common notions. When people today think of God's love, they cannot combine it with the idea of God's wrath. To them, it is one or the other, but they cannot have both. And of course, you know what most people will choose. If I have to

choose myself between God's love and God's wrath, I'm going to choose that God is love. But then you and I have no right to choose. God reveals himself in those characters that he is love. But the wonderful thing is that this God who has righteous wrath against sinners, yet those same objects of his wrath, he extended his love to them. That's the wonderful pitching of the Bible concerning God's love that most people have no idea of because they displaced wrath from the concept of God just to accommodate their own idea of God's love. But that is not the right thinking of God's love. It is not consistent with the perfection of God to say that he himself has to discard because he cannot have both, discard wrath in order to maintain love. Instead, out of his magnificent love that extends to the objects of his righteous wrath, he gave the Lord Jesus Christ in order to pacify that righteous wrath. Now this is where we have to realize that those alone know God's saving love who find the answer to his wrath in the cross of Christ. They are the only ones who have a biblical understanding of God's love and this is what John is saying, in this is love. And how does he define it? He doesn't say, in this is God's love, he provides you everything you need every day, he makes your life beautiful, he makes your life fit as you want it to be lived. Now instead the first act of his love according to his plan, in this is love, not that we love God but that he loves us and sent his son as propitiation for our sin. Now we have there a word that is maybe a big word for many today when John says the manifestation of love is that he sent his son but he sent his son not simply as a model for people how to live rather for a distinct purpose and the big word used is propitiation and I want to explain that simply. To propitiate means to pacify anger. When anger is merely sentimental it is quite easy to propitiate and sometimes your young child may get angry with his parents for some silly reasons and all that a parent will need to do is tickle him in some weak spots of his character and immediately his anger is propitiated. But we are wrong when we think of God's love as something like sentimental, temporary and something emotional that you can somehow immediately propitiate God's wrath by rituals or ceremonies of religion and if that is what you are thinking my friends you are wrong because God's wrath is not the result of some emotion on the part of God. God's wrath is the function of his justice and as long as God is just there will be wrath against sin. It is not merely emotional outrage. God's wrath means he settled opposition to sin. There can be no sin that does not provoke the wrath of God because he is all holiness, all purity and Habakkuk 1:13 puts it so clearly he is of purer eyes than to see, than to look upon evil and if there is evil in your life you are in a native condition where God's wrath is in fire against you, against all sinners and that is the problem of man with sin. Your problem with sin is not just that you are breaking your inner peace. Your problem with sin is not simply that you are making a mess of some areas of your life that is how far some will go when they admit sin that because of their sin they've got problems of conscience or problem with some areas of life that they've made a mess of. It's more serious than that. Our natural condition in sin is to be under God's wrath. That's what Ephesians 2 verse 3 says that we are by nature children of wrath and then it adds us are all the rest of mankind. If there is one platform on which everyone of humanity, of whatever race, whatever nationality, whatever gender, whatever background and culture, if there is one platform on which we all stand equally it is that we are under God's wrath. Well today we are giving labels to different generations and the latest would be the Gen Z. I belong to the baby boomers born in between 1946 and 1964. And in those 20 years what is the common denominator is it was the end of the war, the end of World War II and there was a sudden boom of generating babies. That's why they are called baby boomers. But whether you

are baby boomers or Gen X or Gen Z, whatever it is your generation may be, this you can count on if you are a sinner and you are all the rest of mankind are under the wrath of God. And that is not a joke. The wrath of God, John 3, 36 says, abides with us if we are not believers in Jesus Christ. So every time you do your work in the office and even though your work seems productive and fulfilling you are doing so under the wrath of God. And even when you go to church and hear God's word and all that you are doing are done without any regard for Christ as your Lord, you are still abiding in the wrath of God. That's your problem of sin. It's not simply emotional. It's not simply subjective. It's not simply the mess it makes of your life. It is that you are under God's wrath. But this is the truth of our passage that should be a challenge to us. We need to reform the gospel of unconditional love. The gospel is not unconditional love. The gospel is God's love pacifies His wrath by the cross of Christ. And when I refer to the cross, I do not mean the object that has the shape of the cross. There are still people and there are many who think that there is power in that shape. There is none. Films may depict the power of the shape of the cross by driving away vampires and other evil spirits, but it does not have the power. When the Bible speaks of the cross, it refers to the event that happens. And the event that happened is that one day the Lord Jesus, after living a life of perfection and sinlessness, having satisfied all that the law requires that we could not obey, He then took our position in the place of sin under the law. And He took the penalty of that law upon Himself when He died on the cross. There was nothing less happening than that. Jesus was taking upon himself the wrath of God. Why should that happen? Because God loves. That is the mystery. That is the wonder of the love of God and the result of that to those who believe it. Romans 5 verse 9 says, We are saved by Him from the wrath of God. That is propitiation. Without the death of a substitute, you are deluding yourself that there is no wrath because of unconditional love. That is the delusion. That concept of unconditional love is spreading abroad. People think whatever my life is, whatever mess I have made of myself and whatever filth I have sunk myself in, God looks at me with such delight because He is so helplessly in love with me. That's the false teaching of unconditional love. But what the Bible teaches is much more marvelous. That out of love for sinners, God did not spare the one He truly loves. That is His son. And in wrath against sinners, He punished His own son when He took the place of a substitute. Now, remember this. It is not man that God loves in eternity. Twice in the Gospel of John, first in John 3, 35 and repeated in John 5, 20, we are told the Father loves the Son. Now that is the unconditional love, the love that binds the Father and the Son. And the bond is the Holy Spirit. And the three persons are persons with love with one another. And the only way God loves any of His human creatures who sinned against Him is because He loves them in union with His Son. Unconditional love, no. It is love that is much more marvelous that could love the worst of sinners because of His love for His Son. So you may have imbibed this popular Gospel of unconditional love and you have no care about God in the way you live. And you have been taught to expect God still to be so much in love with you that no matter what you do and no matter what your life is, God will do you good. God will listen for you if you just call to Him anytime like calling a waiter in the restaurant to serve your food and your drink. But the thought of God's love when you understand it in its fullness should lead us to brokenness over our sin. Why should I be loved? I should not marvel at the wrath of God. People do not want to think of the wrath of God. They only want to think of the love of God. But when you know your sinfulness, it is the wrath of God that explains rightly God's attitude towards sinners. He has just and righteous wrath. And I who

am an object of that just wrath, why should I be at the same time the object of His love that is so unfathomable for a mere creature to understand?

One of my favorite living theologians is the Baptist theologian Donald Carson. And he wrote a book in the year 2000, a small book, but I have used it many times when I teach the theology of God's love. The title is *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*. And he's right in calling it the difficult doctrine where to many it's as simple as saying God is love and that settles it because they think of unconditional love. But Carson rightly shows it is a matter for us to be in awe and wonder because it is so unfathomable why the objects of His wrath should also be the objects of His love. So God's love pacifies His righteous wrath. But there's a second thing that it does and this is consistent with John's purpose in this letter. God's love produces His loving church. Let us not forget that the section of this letter of John is about the characters of those who have genuine faith. And one such character that John insists should be an evidence of genuine faith without which one is not credible about his professed faith and that is love for the brethren. The way John puts it in 1 John chapter 3 is how can you say you love God whom you cannot see and not love your brother whom you can see. It's a simple logic but the point is clear.

Anyone who says they are the objects of God's love and that they are recipients of God's love in Christ, in other words, they profess to be saved and believers and yet show no love for brethren, they are not credible at all. And a true recipient of God's love in Christ will naturally love other recipients of the same love. Now this happens not because of a native response on our part but because of the work of the Holy Spirit. And this is part again of John's argument those who are born from above and that is always attributed to the Holy Spirit. In other words, this is teaching us that the Holy Spirit imbues the regenerate with God's character of loving those whom God loves.

Now it is true that love is a universal dimension. After all, the second greatest commandment according to Jesus is love your neighbor as yourself and that extends to all mankind. But in the special sense in which the father's love sent his son, it is displayed not to all humanity but to the new humanity which is manifested by the church. I am not saying that the church will be composed by people who find it easy to love. Oh no. Nor am I saying that once you become a follower of Christ it will be easy for other brethren to love you. But the challenge of love is that God loves us not in the false unconditional love but something greater. He loves us because Christ has met the condition.

So you see it is not because we need to meet any conditions but because Christ has met the condition of his love. It is in union with Jesus Christ that we are to know God's love and then we transmit that love towards others who also are recipients of God's love in Christ. In loving the brethren therefore we do not love because they meet our expectation or because they are vibes with our temperament. No, we love in the same way that God loves us not that we are

lovely or lovable but in Christ. And my friend that's the way God loves. If you want to know this love do not try to reach out to your pocket and see how much you have or your bank account

or credit card or your garments and possessions. It's none of those things. If you want to know God's love it is in Christ and in the church that must be the main reason, the main ground why we extend our love. It's not that they meet our expectations but because they are loved by God in Christ. Now let me say this, if this is the way we love it makes Christian love both

unlimited and with boundaries. Now they are not contradictory and let me explain. It will make Christian love unlimited because Christian love reaches any kind of believers whatever their personality, whatever their temperament, whatever status in life and however different they are from us. We love them because of Christ. It will be unlimited. You cannot have your favorites and preferences and they only become the object of your love and then disregard others. But in saying that it is unlimited I also say it will have boundaries because love is to those who show the evidence that they are recipients of God's love in Christ and therefore they have a regard for His people, a regard for loving the brethren.

Here John points to the anomaly of those who claim to be recipients of God's love but they live in hatred, they live in sin, they live displeasing God.

Now the first response of love by those who believe in Jesus Christ as their substitute is that they love God and in loving God they want to please God and then they see people who claim

to love God but live on in a life that is displeasing to God that cannot be unconditional love. Just as God's love is not unconditional love. They love those who they believe are recipients of the love of God in Christ but if they live in the practice of sin it deals that love because they are displeasing the God we love first. That's the point. We love God first. When you love the brethren first that will create problems. We need to love God first and we want to see brethren pleasing God and there will be actions of love in the Christian way. Others will not associate many times with love but that is part of Christian love because it is first love for God. Love that is conditioned by human distinctions that is flawed love but love without condition of pleasing God is also flawed. We are not going to affirm people who displease God under the guise of unconditional love because of God's love we love Christ then we love the brethren because of Christ and it will have boundaries but then when we are bonded together by love regardless of differences when we truly are praising God and pleasing God regardless of personalities and temperaments we join together in the bond of love.

For those of you who are fans of the PBA you know how unique a theme is because of the chance of their fans. You have heard perhaps many times on tv for us we go actually to Araneta in very crucial games and the more your hairs will stand on end every time you hear the chant he never he never that is not duplicated by any other team. These people are all chanting the same theme and regardless of their personalities most of them do

not know each other. The one thing that binds them is their attachment to a team. That is what we are

in the church. It's not because who you are in comparison to me or because of your similarity to me but because together we chant in praise the name of our God and we seek to please him and in

that we join together in a bond of love. And the challenge of this to us is let us labor to love in the church based on Christ's cross in the power of the Holy Spirit.

I want to challenge those of you who believe you have received Christ but you are living without a church. Do you really love Christ? I ask that in concern and affection for you for the Bible says in Ephesians 5:25 Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her and how can you say you love Christ and you have no love for that for which Christ gave his

life the church and when we love within the body of Christ it will have its pattern after God's love again not the false unconditional love it will be a love that seeks to restore the fallen forgive the penitent but reprove the sinning and sometimes to avoid those who keep on sinning in contrast with the popular unconditional love we are making known that love of God which he displays in Christ this is a love that is greater than unconditional love the unconditional love concept makes God pander to human interest while God's love in Christ orients the sinner to the true nature of fulfillment in life that fulfillment which is to glorify God and enjoy him forever and that is something we do through Christ let the cross of Christ give substance and color the profound truth of God's love for sinners let that love be the atmosphere that radiates in this church the love of God for sinners because of the Lord Jesus Christ then love will not be a mere word love will not be a mere claim but love will truly beat in the heart and extend towards those brethren sometimes that love will mean to express affection sometimes it means to share provision

and sometimes it means to reprove and sometimes it means the broken heart of love in censure but

it is all out of love for God that comes from the heart a few days ago our missionary Mark Aksai shared to me an outline about the love of God and it's a beautiful outline better than most sermons I hear outside this church it's organized it's very organized

very well put words but then he explained to me is the product of AI artificial intelligence it's robotic how in the world we managed to say those words you can only explain us programs and alas that is how some Christians love alas that is how many churches

yes within the membership relate to one another there is claim of love there is the vocabulary of love there can be an organized motion of love but there is no higher

it's programmed and that's what we need to challenge and the way to challenge is this is

as John puts it in this is love he says God is love there should be times when you cry over those words I can understand if it says God is full of wrath against me for I am the just object of his wrath but why should he be the God of love to me and the answer is not because of anything in me but because of the Lord Jesus Christ it is not unconditional love but it is a Christ grounded love and a Christ grounded love that's what we respond to and when we respond to

God's love it will be a love with a heart not a programmed love not a love that is mechanistic

but a love that bits from the heart extends to the brethren and so I ask you do you know that love

that love which God first extended to sinners he justly has wrath upon

wrath upon yet he loves loves enough not to spare his own son but delivered him up for us all that

is our concept of love and as we respond with a hymn give me a sight of savior of your wondrous

love to me oh the love that brought you down to earth to die on Calvary that's the love of God you cannot separate it from what God has done in order that he may reach out to sinners he could

have consigned by wrath to damnation yet he dared to extend love to them to save them we are partaker

of that love today by casting yourself upon the Lord Jesus Christ and be a believer in Christ

and when you are a believer in Christ there will be born in your heart that love that extends to fellow recipients of that love let us refresh that love among ourselves within the boundary of the pleasing of God because of Jesus Christ let us sing give me a sight of savior let's close in prayer a great God and gracious heavenly father when we think of your love we should be able to

say oh wonder of all wonders but many fall short and find themselves deficient in this concept of love that causes wonder because it has been reduced to this false notion of unconditional love that God loves whatever is the condition of a sinner even if he is sunk in the mire of sin but that is not your love for your first love in eternity is that the father loves the son in the bond of the Holy Spirit and it is those who are in union with Jesus Christ that you have that you have love from eternity in unconditional election but loves so that they may be fit for that love through the propitiation of your wrath so grant Lord if we may know what your love is in combination with your just wrath it is out of that magnificent love sending the Lord Jesus Christ to propitiate the wrath that we deserve and through Christ he lived the life of perfect obedience we cannot lead and died the death of penalty that we should have died and thus become

yours through Christ and now know the love of God because we know the propitiation of your wrath

in the cross of the Lord Jesus we pray for those who still are without knowledge of this wonderful

love they may have some notion of love from God the idea of unconditional love but make them realize that their problem with sin is not just some broken piece or some mess in their areas of areas of life their problem with sin is that it has provoked your just wrath and that they are even as they live day by day the wrath of God abides in them may they know the misery of such wrath abiding and yet such gusto love that Christ took upon himself the fullness of your wrath and the cup of his of your of your punishment was poured out upon him and nothing is left for those

who are in union with Jesus Christ so we pray for those who are still outside of Christ that this may be the day when they will cast themselves upon the Lord and Savior and be saved from the wrath of

God through the one who propitiated that wrath but let it also be a refreshing to us who know what that love is because we have sinned and have believed it in the cross of the Lord

Jesus Christ refresh that love that should govern the relationship of brethren in the church let love legit in this church not love that is merely programmed by habit and vocabulary but let it be the love which although a difficult doctrine but a love that is real a love that is based not on personality and temperament vibes but only because of the Lord Jesus Christ it will make Christian love unlimited by any differences between brethren but it will also make our Christian love bound by our love for God first through the Lord Jesus Christ through the Lord Jesus Christ and Christian love may dictate upon us to show our affection share our provision sometimes reprove and at times the broken heart of sensual we ask Lord that may be the love that will be manifested in this church and we ask that this will be because of your love for your people that Jesus Christ has meant all conditions and let our love be so for one another now may the love of the father the grace of his son the



Lord Jesus and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore in Jesus name we pray  
these things amen