

## Sermon 37, Love, Because God Is Love, 1 John 4:7-8

**Proposition:** John presents five excellent reasons for us to love one another, the last and greatest of which is that God is love.

- I. The Exhortation: Let Us Love One Another, v. 7a
- II. The Reasons for the Exhortation, vv. 7b-8
  - A. Love Comes from God, v. 7b
  - B. Lovers Are God-Begotten, v. 7c
  - C. Lovers Know God, v. 7d
  - D. Haters Do Not Know God, v. 8a
  - E. God Is Love, v. 8b

### Introduction

I've said before, dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, that one of the main tasks of preaching is not to wreck the passage. Don't wreck it! And with this evening's passage, that imperative is only too clear. What can I, what can anyone say about this statement that God is love? Nothing like it is to be found in the world religions. Only here, in the Christian revelation, do we see the majesty and greatness of God expressed in such terms. But here's the thing: John doesn't simply tell us that God is love and leave us with a good feeling. He begins and ends this section by applying the love of God. The attitude that's in the leader will be in the people. If God is love, then you and I must love one another. John presents five reasons for us to love one another in the passage before us; the last and greatest of them is the magnificent truth that God is love.

#### **I. The Exhortation: Let Us Love One Another, v. 7a**

John starts by calling us his beloved. He says that a lot in this book. Even though the NIV and other modern translations tone down the intimacy with the substitute (not translation) "dear friends," these are clearly the words of a man who loves the people he's talking to. You know what he's talking about. The love you grow for the people you worship with is unlike any other love you experience. It is transformative, and its bonds last for a very long time. Insofar as John had known and worshipped with these people, he loved them. Insofar as they were not yet born, he loved them by anticipation, even as you already love the grandchildren that have not yet been born to your daughter.

John is showing love to these beloved people by writing this letter to them. I'm showing love for you by preaching to you. But it doesn't stop there. Far from it. John exhorts us to love one another, without limit or exclusion. You are not allowed to say "I can't love him." You must love him. You must love her. You've heard, I hope, the biblical counselor's response to the man who comes in and says "I just don't love my wife anymore."

The counselor says, “Well, the Bible says, ‘Husbands, love your wives.’”

“Yeah, but I just don’t. I’ve fallen out of love with her.”

“Fine, then,” says the counselor. “‘Love your neighbor.’ If you can’t love her as a wife, love her as a neighbor.”

“I can’t do that either,” the guy says. “She’s mean to me and I really don’t feel emotionally safe around her.”

“Well then,” the counselor tells him, “‘Love your enemies.’”

Brothers and sisters, we must love one another! What does this mean? Well, John has been talking about it for the last several chapters. One of its implications is that you need to lay down your wallet. In other words, “love each other” does not *primarily* mean “Have tender and warm feelings about each other.” Those are fine and good in their own way, but if you think that the main way to obey this command is to attempt to have nice feelings about so-and-so, then you need to think again. John is going to tell us that God’s love is what led Him to give His only Son. You’ve heard it a million times, for good reason: Love is an action, not a feeling. I mean, what would you think if the passage read “God so loved the world that the warm fuzzies actually spilled over and dripped on the floor of Heaven?”

For me to love my wife is not primarily to have a warm and happy feeling about her. It’s expressed by husbanding her, being everything to her that I ought to be, treating her how I would want to be treated, showing her the love that I would want to receive. For us in this church to love each other, similarly, requires action. There is no love without action because love is an act.

So how can we love each other? By opening our homes. When’s the last time you invited a church member into your space? When’s the last time you gave a gift to someone in this church? When did you last spend quality time with a member of this congregation who’s not part of your immediate family? When did you last perform an act of service for someone in this church? When did you last give a hug or a meaningful handshake to someone in this church? Those are basically the five love languages; are you speaking them?

In many ways, you are. I praise God for that. I have spoken before of the generosity of this congregation. It is astonishing that a group this small is this generous to support essentially a full-time pastor. Every time I get paid, I have a warm fuzzy feeling because I know that the check might as well say on the memo line, “You are loved and valued. They could be spending this on video games or remodeling or books or trips to Hawaii. Instead, they are taking a big chunk of their income and spending it on pastoral care.” I am honored and touched by the depth of your generous hearts. You value what I do for this congregation, and I know that in many ways, you are giving not primarily for the service you receive, but because you want to support the availability of that service for the rest of the church. That’s tremendous. But don’t back off now. Now is the time to love one another. Now is the time to love with acts of service, quality time, physical touch, gifts, and words of affirmation. How many times have you said to someone in this church, “I really appreciate you. The gifts and needs you bring to the body are so perfect and so helpful to all of us!”? It may feel awkward. But love doesn’t care about awkwardness.

Why doesn't love care about awkwardness? I'm so glad you asked! Look with me at all the reasons you and I have to love one another.

## **II. The Reasons for the Exhortation, vv. 7b-8**

John says "Let us love, *for*." What does that "for" mean? It means the same thing as "because." It means, "Now I'm going to specify a reason for what I just told you." And wow! John specifies some exceedingly compelling reasons here.

### **A. Love Comes from God, v. 7b**

The first reason is the source of love. Love comes from God. We need to use this incredible gift because it was given to us by God Himself.

Have you ever had an experience like that, where you know that grandma gave you that Pampered Chef egg slicer that you thought was the most ridiculous thing you'd ever seen? Yet suddenly grandma's coming over, and you decide you'd better dig in the drawer and pull out the egg slicer so that you can be sure to show her that you're using it. Well, if someone gives you a powerful gift, a valuable gift, something that you use every day, you don't have to make a show of using it. You just put it to work because it works. I am typing this right now on a keyboard that the Merrimack church gave me when I started my internship there. I don't have to dust it off and make a show of using it when Merrimack folks come visiting. Rather, their gift is an essential part of my daily life. I've typed hundreds of thousands of words on this thing.

Well, the source of this keyboard is a blessing; of all the things I got in Merrimack, it may be the one I touch the most. But John is not emphasizing the utility of the gift (though loving is by far the most worthwhile thing you can do) but rather the majesty of the giver. Love is from God! Grandma may give you a worthless gift. Uncle Fred may give you an Xbox when you hate video games. Your child may give you a wilted dandelion. But God is going to give you exactly what you need. Love is from Him. That means that you need to make use of it. He didn't give you something that makes no difference in your life. He gave you something that makes all the difference in your life. Love, brothers and sisters, is from God.

What that also implies is that you are not the ultimate source of any love that you show to others. If love is in your heart, it is not of your heart. It is yours, your action, your feeling — but it is not of you. It is of God. God put it there. You can't drum up love from within yourself; you need God to make it happen. Paul puts this another way when he calls love a fruit of the Spirit. He means that the Spirit is the source of love; He is the one who produces love in your life. The love is indeed in your life, not just in the Spirit's life. But it is there from the Spirit. So if you want to love one another, what do you need to do? You need to solicit the Spirit's presence in your life. You need to focus on the one who creates the love in your heart. This doesn't exclude efforts to speak affirming words, spend quality time, give gifts, and so on. Rather, it powers those efforts, which will quickly fizzle if they aren't Spirit-driven.

So love is from God. There is no better reason to love, and no better way to generate love. Just as electricity is from the power plant or apples are from trees, love is from God. There is no other way to get it.

### **B. Lovers Are God-Begotten, v. 7c**

But that's just the first reason that you and I ought to love one another. The next reason is equally compelling. Everyone who loves is God-begotten. Once again, John doesn't start with the cause (God-begottenness) but with the effect (love). But the effect and the cause are inextricably linked. You should love because love is the effect of being born of God, and you have been born of God! God begot you as His own child in Christ. Therefore, you have the power to love. You are God-begotten, and so you are a lover! Brothers and sisters, do you actually believe this? You see, John has listed his second gospel motive in a row. You should love, he says. That's law. But the first motive for it is the gospel motive that the Spirit grows the fruit of love in your life. The second motive for it is the gospel motive that in Christ, you have been born again as a child of God and in that new identity you love. Actions flow from your identity; persons perform actions, not the other way around. And because of your identity as a child of God, you can love. You can speak the five love languages in this church and in your home. You can be someone that people enjoy spending time with because your love and kindness are so marked. You can be someone your spouse is grateful to have married. All of this is because of what God did for you in Jesus Christ. You are now part of a loving family, and if you fail to love, it's not because your Father or Elder Brother set you a bad example.

### **C. Lovers Know God, v. 7d**

John puts it in yet a different way for his third motivation to love. Lovers know God. Everyone who exercises love, everyone who wants what best for another, does what's best for another, and enjoys another — all of those people know God.

The question arises here “What about loving unbelievers? What about the secular guy who's a great dad, the non-believing woman who selflessly runs a charity helping the poor, the Buddhist monk who forgives his enemies? Do they therefore know God?” This is a tough question. We can categorically affirm, based on the clear words of this text and many others, that genuine love is impossible for those who do not know God. We already said that love is a fruit of the Spirit and we know that the Spirit is not present in the life of anyone who doesn't know Christ. If these apparent non-Christians are manifesting the true fruit of the Spirit which is love, then they are actually Christians. That is a gospel truth. But at the same time, we must remember that natural affection and selflessness are not fruits of the Spirit. If the nonbeliever is a great dad but doesn't love God with all his heart, then he's still not a Christian and the natural affection and common grace that culminate in his fatherly love are, at the end of the day, not the same thing as the Holy-Spirit-generated love that John's talking about here. Lovers know God. If you love, truly love, you know Him.

Do you want to know God? Love each other. Do you want to not know God, to be cut off from Him? Then go ahead and hate your brother. Go ahead and neglect this duty. You will get more distant from God every day if you persist in the sin of failing to love your brothers and sisters, in your home and in your church. Lovers know God. Therefore, you need to seek to love Him so that you can know Him.

#### **D. Haters Do Not Know God, v. 8a**

But here's the other thing: Haters do not know God. If you do not have the supernatural, Holy-Spirit generated love for others in your heart, then you do not know God. Remember, as we've seen in this book there is no such thing as benign neglect. You either actively love or you hate. There is no passive loving because love is an action! Brothers and sisters, John is once again applying the same insights we've seen from him over and over in this letter. Christians may not say "It's okay. I don't love so-and-so but I'm still a pretty good person." It doesn't work that way! Instead, as I just said, giving in to the temptation to laziness or resentment or bitterness is one of the most effective ways to stop knowing God. It will prevent you from understanding what He's like.

Do you love? If there is no act of love in your life, you don't know God. If there are acts of love but they are from you, not from the Holy Spirit, then you don't know God.

#### **E. God Is Love, v. 8b**

Why does John say this? Because in the final analysis, as important the human action of love is, the character of God is far more important. And the character of God is such that God is love. John doesn't say that God is loving, that is, that love is something He engages in but could theoretically stop engaging in. He says that God is love. God is always love, from all eternity, as the Father loves the Son and the Spirit and they both love each other and the Father in return. This is an important clue to the nature of God. It tells us that God is not like us, a substance who holds properties. Rather, He is His properties. You are loving; God is love. You are just; God is justice. And so on. Everything that He is, He is entirely and completely. His properties cannot be separated from His being, because He is His own being.

Anyway, there is far more to say about God's being love. What we know is that at the heart of the universe is not hatred, malice, or indifference, but love — the love that made us and for whom we were made. Can you live for Him today? Can you live like Him today? Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself for us. Amen.