

God is Love

1 John 4:7-12

May 25 & 26, 2013
Steve DeWitt

I am going to read our text for today. When the message is done, we have the joy of partaking in the Lord's Supper together. So this message will be our preparation for communion.

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 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. 1 John 4:7-12 (ESV)

We begin with verses 7-8 and this truly wonderful statement, *God is love*. He will repeat this again in verse 16. *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.*

Paul turns a normal sermon outline upside down. He begins with his application. *Beloved, let us love one another*. That's the conclusion he wants us to reach. That's where he is going, but exhortations to love without any reason often do not work. Think of the parent who tells his son and daughter they need to love each other and get along. "Why should we?" "Because I said so" won't likely produce much harmony or mutual affection. What is needed is a deep understanding of relationship that reflects something even deeper and more wonderful. John sets out to unfold that deeper and more wonderful source of love.

The call to love one another is quickly followed by the reason for doing so. The reasons are not sociological or utilitarian. It's not because loving each other is the more human way or that it leads to a better society, church, or back seat on the family vacation. It has everything to do with God. As we like to say here, *Everything is theology*. Everything has everything to do with God! When we pick something and disconnect it from God, we are doing what Eve did in the garden when she took the fruit and purposefully severed this one action from the glorious personhood and purposes of Almighty God. How did that go for her? Everything is theology. Everything has everything to do with God. One of my personal goals at Bethel is to move us as a church toward an increasing God-centeredness in all we do living out a deep and wonder-filled vision of who God is.

That is essentially what John is saying here. *Application! Let us love one another. Why? God!* This principle lies behind this whole letter. We live what we believe. If you want to know what you actually believe, look at your moral choices and whether love is a mark of your relationships. You could think that John picks love arbitrarily; I mean, why not look at your bowling average or favorite food as the great indicator of genuine salvation? *John says love is the defining attribute for a genuine child of God because love is the defining attribute of God himself.*

He says that love is from God and whoever loves is a child of God and knows God. Take this verse out of context and...

"All you need is love
All you need is love
All you need is love, love
Love is all you need

*There's nothing you can make that can't be made.
No one you can save that can't be saved.
Nothing you can do but you can learn how to be you in time.
It's easy.*

*All you need is love.
All you need is love.
All you need is love, love.
Love is all you need."*
(All You Need is Love, Lennon-McCartney, 1967)

You cannot pluck these verses out of context and simply say, *If you love, you're good with God*. All the other things he has said apply including the previous verses about confessing Jesus as Lord God come in the flesh.

Yet, love is a defining quality of true Christians. Why? John says, because God is love.

God is Love

God is love? Notice it's not, *love is God*. That's a dyslexic reading and gets it backwards. *God is love* is not a statement of his essential character as much as a characteristic of all he does. It is his nature to love. Remember, our definition of love: *self-giving for the good and joy of another*. God's nature is to give of himself; to sacrifice for others; to pursue their joy as the source of his own joy.

God's love is relational and inner-Trinitarian

To understand God's love, we have to peer into the windows we have of how God relates to himself within those three relationships: Father, Son, and Spirit. What we see there is love. They are reciprocating giving of themselves in communication, affirmation, exultation for the joy and gladness of the other.

- *The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.* (John 3:35)
- *But I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.* (John 14:31)

They love each other and this shows itself in how they relate to one another; a relating that extends back into eternity past and will forever be true—eternal, divine, Trinitarian love.

This quality of love is so central to who God is and what he does that John can write, God IS love. It is his nature to love.

Seven qualities of God's love

A.W. Pink describes seven qualities of God's love that I think are helpful (A.W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, p. 77.):

Uninfluenced

It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you. (Deuteronomy 7:7-8)

There is nothing in us that influences God to love us. He loves us because he chooses to love us and because it is his nature to love.

Eternal

The LORD appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. (Jeremiah 31:3)

God's nature is eternal. His love toward us is an eternal, unending love.

Sovereign (Romans 9:13)

Infinite (Ephesians 2:4)

Immutable/Unchangeable (James 1:17)

Holy (1 John 1:5)

Gracious (Romans 8:32-39)

What does God's nature to love mean for us? John says, *everything. And whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. (1 John 4:7-8)*

As it is God's nature to love, so it is with God's children. We are born of God. We know God through his Son, Jesus. Like Father, like Son. If the general direction of our lives is fundamentally self-oriented without evidence of others-orientation, then God can't be our Father. Remember the application, *Let us love one another. (1 John 4:7)* That's where he's going. Why? God is love and all who share his nature will share his love.

Still we could ask, *How does God show his love?* It's one thing to say that you love, like my college roommate who I would hear whispering in the phone at night to some girl on campus, "I love you." Then two days later he'd be whispering with a different girl on campus, "I love you." That's a strange definition of love. How do you know if somebody loves you? How do we know if God actually loves us?

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. (1 John 4:9-10)

The Sending and Sacrifice of Jesus Shows us What Divine Love is Like

In this the love of God was made manifest among us (1 John 4:9)—Here is how God showed divine love—he sent his only Son into the world.

Remember one of the attributes of God's love, uninfluenced. His love is not dependent. It is eternally independent of all causations other than his sovereign nature and choice to love. Verse 10 makes it clear, *not that we have loved God but that he loved us.* It's easy to love people that love us. I tend to love people who love me. But to love without respect to the love or lovability of the other, that is a unique love.

We are most accustomed to love that is based on performance or family status or being loveable in some way. In the singles world, people try to get loved by being love-worthy. So they glam up or edit their eHarmony profile hoping that the best photos and descriptions of themselves in glowing terms will make them love-worthy. *Please, somebody find me loveable.*

God's love could not be based on our loveability as God loved us before we even existed. Ephesians 1:4-5, *in love he predestined us for adoption as sons.* If God chose to love us before we even existed, how can we think his love is based upon anything in us? John will say later, *we love because he first loved us* (1 John 4:19). Our love is a *responding* love. God's is an *uninfluenced, initiating* love.

How do we see his love? There's a beautiful description here of God's love as saving activity for us through Christ. God sent his son. He was sent as a propitiation. Remember that from chapter 2? Propitiation is God satisfying his own wrath against sin. It's like the bank paying off the mortgage you owe it. God pays off his own wrath at our sin. Jesus' death was our propitiation. That is love. Eternal. Self-denying. Self-dying.

The cross is where we see divine Trinitarian love directed toward us

It is as close to knowing what it's like to be a part of the Trinity as we will ever have.

Where is John going with all this? Remember the application, *let us love one another.* (1 John 4:7) *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.* (1 John 4:11-12)

When Christians love one another with God's kind of love (Big Trinity), his love is made complete in us (little trinity)

Do you see John's point? Since God is love and we share his nature as his children, when we love one another we are experiencing in our human relationships the joy and gladness experienced within the Godhead. Our little trinities reflect the divine one. Remember God's purpose in all things is to glorify himself. He is glorified by the reflections of his glorious person in us. This includes holiness and truth, creativity and beauty, industry and stewardship, but there is one supreme attribute of God that is so central to who he is that it uniquely glorifies him: *love one another.*

Why is division in the church so damaging? Why is divorce in marriage so painful? Why are sibling rivalry and hatred so devastating? Because the church, and marriage, and family are gifts from God meant for harmony and joy and sin devastates it to our own agony.

But in love, God sent Jesus to take away sin's pain and to restore us fully and we can know who has this spiritual life in them by seeing who self-gives for others. Who is seeking their joy in the joy of others?

Beloved, let us love one another. It is an obligation but it is also our opportunity to experience the wonder of who God is in our lives. Love—not receiving, but giving.

Since the call to love one another is built upon the loving model of Trinitarian divine love, what is really at stake in our interpersonal relationships?

These relationships are not disposable. They have value for many reasons but one of them is that we are called to live out God's love in us by loving one another with the same kind of love we have received. As we do, God's love in us is completed; fully expressed. Your wife, your husband, your siblings, your family, your fellow church members are all places where this love ought to be displayed and when it is, it shows God's saving love is in us. His application is simply, *Let us love one another*.

Love gives for the joy of others. God gives love to us in sending Jesus. Jesus gives love to us in dying for us. We give love to each other showing that divine love is truly in us. God's love creates self-giving loving relationships. The Big Trinity creates little trinities that actively seek joy in the joy of others. *Let us love one another!*

Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.

© 2013 by Steve DeWitt. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include Bethel's website address (www.bethelweb.org) on the copied resource.