

December 20, 2015 by Steve Brandon



Christmas Love

1 John 4:7-12

1. Love One Another (verses 7-8).
2. God Loved Us (verses 9-10).
3. Love One Another (verses 11-12).

I invite you to open your Bibles to 1 John 4. Our text this morning covers verses 7-12. Let's begin by reading these verses.

1 John 4:7

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.

In these six verses, there are two commands. The first comes in verse 7. The second comes in verse 11. And, these commands are actually one and the same. Verse 7, ...

1 John 4:7

Beloved, let us love one another, ...

Verse 11, ...

1 John 4:11

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

The clear call of this passage is to love one another. And everything else in this passage supports this command to love one another.

Now, the rest of the passage doesn't support the command in terms of telling us how to love each other. That is, it doesn't tell us that we should love each other earnestly (like 1 Peter 4:8 says). Or, it doesn't tell us that we should love each other by being "patient" and "kind" with one another (like 1 Corinthians 13 says). Rather, these verses support the command in terms of telling us why to love each other.

And when it comes down to it, the reason is simple: we love because God loved us first. This is exactly what verse 19 says, ...

1 John 4:19

We love because he first loved us.

And this is the argument of our text today. Look at verse 11, ...

1 John 4:11

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

There is an order here. God loved us first. And since he loved us, we also ought to love one another. This is the argument of verse 7, ...

1 John 4:7

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God,

In other words, love originates and comes from God first; love doesn't originate in us. It's the same argument in verse 10.

1 John 4:10

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us.

See, God loved us first. And so, we are called to respond in love toward others. What I want to do this morning is peel that passage away from the inside out. I want to look at my second point first (which focuses upon God's love for us), because that's how the passage unfolds. And then, we will look at the first and third points (which are the same) and focus upon our love for one another. So, let's look at our second point this morning.

2. God Loved Us (verses 9-10).

Let's look at verses 9 and 10.

1 John 4:9-10

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.

Both verses begin with a similar emphasis. "In this the love of God was made manifest" (verse 9). "In this is love" (verse 10). In effect, John is saying, "Do you want to know what love is about? Let me tell you what love is about."

And he proceeds to describe Christmas. Verse 9 says, "... God sent his only Son into the world." And verse 10 again says, "... [God] sent his Son." In other words, you might say it like this: "In this is love, 'Love is Christmas.'" Love is God sending his Son into this world.

This, by the way, is why I have entitled my message, "Christmas Love." Because, Christmas is all about love. The reason why God sent his Son is because we were lost in our sins and headed to eternal death. But God did the loving thing and sent his Son, so that we could live. This is the message of verse 9,

1 John 4:9

... God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.

When John explained the incarnation, he used these words: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14)." "In him was life (John 1:4)."

Jesus often talked about giving life. He said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). "Whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). Jesus said, "'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). Jesus was the light that brings life.

Jesus said, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" (John 11:25). Jesus came to give life. Jesus came to give eternal life.

John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." When God sent his son into the world, it was an act motivated by love. It was an act designed to give life.

You say, "How did Jesus give us life?" He gave life through his death. In other words, he died for our sins, so that we would live.

This was clear from the very first moment that he was born. Before Mary gave birth, an angel of the Lord told Joseph in a dream, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:20-22). How is he going to do this? By dying on the cross. By paying for our sins.

And that's exactly what John says in verse 10, ...

1 John 4:10

[God] sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

That word, "propitiation" is a big word that we don't use every day. But, it is an important theological word that we have seen before. We saw it back in chapter 2 and verse 2, ...

1 John 2:2

He is the propitiation for our sins.

When you think of "propitiation," you should think of the word, "wrath." Because, "propitiation," means "appeasing the wrath." God was angry because of our sins. He was extremely angry, because we have chosen the sinful way instead of the righteous way. The wrath of his fury was upon us.

But (and here is the good news), the sacrifice of Jesus turned his wrath into peace. When we place our faith in Christ, God is no longer angry with us. Instead, God delights in us. Our sins are forgiven, because Jesus has taken upon Himself the wrath God meant for us.

Here's an illustration, imperfect as it is. It's early in the morning and a husband and wife have an argument. It's time for the husband to go to

work. And so, off he goes, with argument still unresolved. Tension remains throughout the day. But, on his way home from work, he stops by the florist. And he buys a dozen roses.

Then, he steps in the door and presents the flowers to his wife. She sees the peace offering, and her anger toward him dissipates in a moment. She embraces him with a big hug and many kisses. The flowers propitiate her anger.

That's what propitiation means. It means that one's anger has been turned into love. And that's what the cross does for us. It turns God's anger for our sin into love and grace, because the payment has been made. Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our sins on the cross. This is what it means in verse 10, ...

1 John 4:10
[God] sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

And if you want to push this illustration a bit further, it goes like this. Husband and wife have an argument. Husband goes to work, and the wife goes to the florist. And she picks up the flowers, the very thing that she knows will turn her anger toward her husband into love. And she brings these flowers home and sets them by the door. So that, when he comes home the flowers are waiting for him. He simply needs to pick up the flowers and offer them to his wife. And he gets the same loving reaction from his wife -- hugs and kisses -- as the flowers propitiate her anger.

See, this is what God did with Jesus. He initiated the propitiation.

1 John 4:10
[God] sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

And we simply need to pick up the flowers and offer them to God. We simply need to believe in Jesus, who died for us. And God's wrath toward us is propitiated. No longer are we under his wrath, but we get life instead.

That's the idea of verse 9, ...

1 John 4:9
... God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.

True life comes through Jesus Christ. In fact, Jesus said that true life comes only through him. He said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). If you want ultimate life, it comes through Jesus. It comes through faith in him. There's no other way.

That's what Christmas is about.

1 John 4:9
... God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.

See, apart from him, we were destined to death. But, he gave his life so that we might live. And this is Christmas love. When Jesus came to lay down his life for us. In fact, we saw this a few weeks ago.

1 John 3:16
By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us.

Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Those who lay down their lives are called heroes. Examples of this are too many to count.

Perhaps you remember Stephanie Decker, from Henryville, Indiana. When a tornado ripped through her hometown on March 2, 2012, the windows were shattered and her house began to collapse. Instinctively, she lay on top of her 8-year-old son, Domonick, and her 5 year-old daughter, Reese, protecting them from the falling debris. Seven of her ribs were broken. One of her lungs was punctured. Her legs were nearly severed in the accident. But, her children were both untouched. They went and got help for their mother, who was rushed to the hospital, where her legs were amputated a few hours later. Stephanie Decker laid down her life for her children.

Perhaps you have heard of Kyle Carpenter. He was a U. S. Marine deployed to Afghanistan in 2010. On November 21, 2010, he was on a rooftop security post, when a grenade was thrown onto the rooftop. To protect his fellow Marine on duty, he attempted to cover the grenade. He survived the blast, but his jaw and right arm were shattered, requiring multiple surgeries. Eventually, he lost his right eye and most of his teeth because of the explosion. Kyle Carpenter laid down his life for his friend.

Perhaps you have heard of Michael Landsberry, a former U. S. Marine. He was teaching middle school math on October 21, 2013 in Sparks, Nevada. On that day a 12 year-old came to school wielding a semi-automatic handgun. When the shots rang out, Landsberry didn't run. Instead, he held his hands high and calmly approached the shooter, seeking to persuade him to put down his weapon. Instead, he was shot in cold blood, but potentially saved other children who had time to run. Michael Landsberry laid down his life for his friends.

Stephanie Decker and Kyle Carpenter and Michael Landsberry are but a few illustrations of those who show great love for their fellow men by offering up their life in the place of others. All of these individuals placed themselves between harm's way and their friends. And what they did on the human scale, Jesus did on the heavenly scale.

Jesus put himself between us and the wrath of God, and satisfied God's wrath on our behalf. He did this so we could know God's love! He did this so we could live. This is love. This is Christmas love.

But, what makes Christmas love even greater is that we weren't his friends. When Paul describes our state before we believe, he doesn't use words like, "friends of God" or "seekers of God." No, he calls us "enemies of God." "While we were enemies we were reconciled to God" (Romans 5:10). Paul described us as "children of wrath" in Ephesians 2:3. In other words, God was angry with us because of our sin.

But, that's precisely when he expressed his great love toward us. "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). That's what Christmas is all about. Jesus coming as a baby to die as a Savior, saving us from our sins.

Do you remember the message of the angelic announcement to the shepherds in the field? The angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).

He did this because he loved us. God was under no moral obligation to come and save us. But, he did, because he loved us.

And, according to the logic of our text this morning, God's love for us compels us to love one another. Isn't this the point of verse 11?

1 John 4:11
Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

This is the clear application of our text. This moves us nicely to our final points this morning. My second point this morning is that God Loved Us (verses 9-10). My first (and third) points are one and the same. We will take them together.

1. Love One Another (verses 7-8). **3. Love One Another (verses 11-12).**

1 John 4:7-8
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.

These verses bring us back to the purpose of 1 John. As I say each week, 1 John was written to those in the church who had believed in Jesus, but were in need of assurance. John writes, ...

1 John 5:13
I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

And this knowledge doesn't come through simply telling them that they have eternal life. Rather this knowledge comes through certain tests. And one of those tests is the test of love (as we see here in verses 7 and 8). Are you loving others? Because (as John argues), "love is from God."

In other words, we love because God gives us love. Our love comes from him. And those who love can have assurance that they have been "born of God" (verse 7). And those who love can have assurance that they "know God" (verse 7).

Because, God is real, and he works in our lives. One of the ways that he works is by producing love in us. If one doesn't love, I don't care what he says, he doesn't know God. That's the reality of verse 8, ...

1 John 4:8
Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Now, what makes these verses particularly difficult is that we know many people who don't know God, but who have an incredible capacity to love. Do you know what I'm talking about? People who would never claim the name of Christ; people who would never step foot into the doors of a church; and yet they are people who would give the shirt off their back for you. Do names and faces come to mind? I can think of several people in my own life who are like this.

And so, how do you explain this? They clearly deny God. And yet, they can pass the love test of verse 7.

Jesus acknowledged this. In the Sermon on the Mount he said, "If you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?" (Matthew 7:46). "And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" (Matthew 7:47).

I think that John must be talking about a deeper love, one that can only be explained by God's work in your life. I think the only way to make sense of verse 7 is to phrase it something like this:

1 John 4:7 [brackets mine]

Beloved, let us love one another, for [genuine and true and long-lasting] love is from God [as it is part of his character], and whoever loves [in such a way that his love can only be explained by God's working in his life] has been born of God and knows God.

Do you know this sort of love?

In other words, you might say it this way. Are there believers in your life who you find unlovely. You find them difficult to love. You don't much care for them. Yet, because of the grace of God within you, you find yourself reaching out to them and demonstrating love to them. And the only way that you can explain it is because God is at work in your life.

If this is the case, then you pass the love test. And you can have assurance that you have been born of God (verse 7). And you can have assurance that you know God (verse 7). But, if the only love that you see in your life is "worldly love" -- that is, the same sort of love as your unsaved friend possesses; the sort of love that loves because love will come in return -- then, you can't pass the love test.

That's all theory, so let's get down to some practicals. I want for you to think about this week. How have you loved others this very week? Can you think of some specific ways that you have loved? Are there specific acts of love that you have performed this week that would give you assurance that you pass the love test?

These can be anything from verbally expressing encouragement and hope and help to another, just the sort of words that you would like to hear yourself. It can be doing something for another, just the sort of thing that you would like others to do for you.

It might be in attitude. When Paul gave an exposition of love, he said, "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

Can you think of examples this week of being patient and kind to others? Can you think of examples this week of bearing something difficult? Can you think of examples this week of believing the best in another? Can you think of examples this week of enduring difficult things from another?

Now, if you are struggling to think of examples, it may be that you fail the love test. God producing love in you should be obvious. Now, it may also be that you are failing in your observation skills. It may be that God is working his love in you, but you simply don't have the maturity to see it. If this is the case, it might be good to ask others if they see it. You want to pass this test! You want to pass the love test.

Passing the love test should be obvious to all. Verse 12 tell us that ...

1 John 4:12

No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

The verse is telling us our love for others is a way to show God to the world. "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" (John 13:34-35).

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