

The Love of God

Scripture: *1 John 4:7-21.*

Exegetical Big Idea: God's unconditional love for us demonstrated by Christ on the cross compels us to express unconditional love in all our relationships.

Introduction

Our topic of reflection this morning is, *The Love of God*, and our main passage for our reflections is **1 John 4:7-21**. In this passage, John gives us first, an *insight* into the love of God. Second, he presents to us the supreme *illustration* of the love of God. Third, he reminds us of what the *implications* of the love of God are for us. **3I's:** *Insight, Illustration, and Implications.*

I. An Insight into God's Love (Verses 8 & 16)

- 1) In **verses 8 and 16**, the Apostle John gives us a very profound *insight* into the love of God by declaring that *God is love*. In the English language we use the word *love* to describe our affection for our spouses, our friends, or our family members. We also use the word for things we like, such as, for example, chocolate, as in: *I love chocolate!*
- 2) At the time John wrote this epistle, in the Greek language, they had two main words for our English word, *love*. The first word was *Eros*. *Eros* They used this word for marital love. *Eros* denotes *earned love* because it is conditional upon the object of my love *drawing out* my love by what they are or what they do; I love her *because* . . . The second word was *Phileo*. *Phileo* was used to describe the brotherly or friendship affection we have for our siblings, our school mates or work mates. *Phileo* is also conditional because we *phileo* our siblings, and so on, *because* we share things in common with them; the same parents, home, school, career, interests, etc.
- 3) The Greek word for love that John used in this epistle, and in his other NT writings, however, is a third Greek word that was used almost exclusively in the NT for God's love. That word is *Agape*. The meaning of this third Greek word has a very different meaning from *Phileo* and *Eros* because it refers to unmotivated and unconditional love; there is nothing in the object of God's love that pulls out His love. God does not look at us and say I love you *because* you are good or holy or beautiful or righteous. Or because you read your Bible three times a day or you go to church regularly or you come from this tribe or from that country. *Agape* is complete accepting love with no conditions attached; it is total unconditional love.

- 4) This, of course, is both disconcerting and encouraging at the same time because it means we cannot control or manipulate or increase or decrease God's love for us, as we can do with human love! There is nothing you and I can do to earn God's love because His love does not depend on us; it depends on His unchanging Agape nature! God's love for us is not strengthened by how good we have been or what we have done or by the promises we make to Him to be good, or to be better than we are now. He just loves us just as we are. This is the kind of unconditional love what we seek from our human relationships but we always fail to get, isn't it? This is because, you see, God alone is our true source of unconditional love.
- 5) Because of the great gulf between our inherent sinfulness and God's unchanging holiness, if God's love depended on something attractive in us, there would be no hope at all for us! God's love springs out of Himself spontaneously without reference to the one loved, because He *is* love.
- 6) The nearest experience that human beings have of the unconditional love of God is the love of a mother for a baby. The baby is loved simply because it is there. As a matter of fact everything about the baby should let the mother not love it; near-death to birth it, sleepless nights, it smells, it cries, etc. but the mother loves it just because it is there. Yet, even a mother's love is still a very poor comparison to God's Agape because, as the Prophet Isaiah reminds us in **Is. 49:15**, *even mothers forget their children, but not God*. Some mothers, after all, abandon and/or abort their babies, isn't it?
- 7) So, when John tells us that *God is love* in this passage, this is the profound *insight* he gives us into the amazing *agape* love of God.

II. The Illustration of God's Love (Verses 9-18)

- 1) In **verses 9 and 10** John presents God's supreme illustration or demonstration of His *Agape* love for us. He writes: *This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*
- 2) John tells us here that God's supreme illustration or demonstration of His *Agape* love for us is that He sent His one and only Son, Christ Jesus, into the world as an atoning sacrifice for our sins so that we might live the Christian life through Him. John then goes on to say that God the Son did not come to die for us because we loved Him! On the contrary not only did we not love Him, as John says here, we actually wanted nothing to do with God, because, as John again reminds us in **John 3:19**, we loved the darkness of sin rather than the light and truth of God. This is why in **verse 19**, John declares that we love because He first loved us.
- 3) In **verse 17** John submits to us two amazing ways in which we have experienced the love of God through Christ's death for us.

- 4) First, in **verse 17** John writes: *This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the Day of Judgment.* John is saying here that the confidence we can have on the Day of Judgment at Christ's Second Coming is that, because of Christ's work on the cross for us, we will not get from God what we deserve to get from Him as sinners, which is His judgment of eternal damnation and separation from God. This is the first amazing way in which we have experienced the love of God through Christ's work on the cross. Bible scholars refer to this as the *mercy of God*.
- 5) The second amazing way in which we have experienced the love of God through Christ's work on the cross is still in **verse 17** where John writes: *In this world we are like Jesus.* What an extraordinary statement! He means that as Christians who have placed our faith in Christ's work on the cross for us, we are now getting from God what we absolutely do not deserve and could never earn from God, which is His adopting us into His family to become co-heirs with Christ as Paul reminds us in **Rom. 8:17**. The Bible refers to this un-earned, un-deserved, and even un-asked for demonstration of God's love as *the grace of God*.
- 6) By talking about the Day of Judgment here in **verse 17**, John is reminding us that God's love does not negate His judgment of sin. In fact, it was because of His abhorrence of sin, and His judgment of sin, that God, in Christ, came to die in our place on the cross. On the cross both the love of God for sinners and the righteous judgment of God against sin came together in an amazing way that only God's wisdom could have made possible to grant to us both His mercy and amazing grace. This is why in **1 Cor. 1:20**, Paul refers to Christ's work on the cross as the wisdom of God.
- 7) These two ways in which we experience God's perfect love for us as Christians is the reason John goes on to write in **verse 18**: *Perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment* and in **verse 13** he says that this is because God has given His Holy Spirit to us to make us experience His love.
- 8) John is saying here that when we become Christians, by His Holy Spirit who comes to in-dwell us, God imparts to us a sense of His Agape love for us in the form of His grace and mercy that were supremely *illustrated* or demonstrated by Christ's work for us on the cross.

III. The Implications for us of God's Love (Verses 19-21)

- 1) Wherever you read about the love of God in the NT you will find that it is referring *not* to emotions but to concrete actions. This why John writes this in **verse 9**: *God showed how much He loved us by sending His one and only Son*; it is the action of God *sending* His only Son to die for us on the cross that shows His love for us.

- 2) In **verse 7** when John writes, *Let us love one another*, the Greek word for *love* that he uses is a Greek verb in the active, present tense that literally means *Let us practice loving each other*. *Practice* refers to concrete action, not mere emotions or words. The implications of this for us is that as His children, God expects us to exemplify to others the *agape* love that He has bestowed on us, not primarily through our feelings, but through our *will* in terms of *decisions we make to engage in actions that demonstrate agape love*. Have you noticed that the Bible never asks us to *like* people, but instead to *love* them? The reason is this: We naturally and effortlessly *like* people who are *like* us because we have things in common with them. We don't choose to like them; liking them is an effortless experience for us.
- 3) Biblical love, on the other hand, is the action of our will that has nothing to do with whether we like the person or not. Since we like those we have things in common with, God probably doesn't *like* us very much because, as rebellious sinners, we are everything that He is not, and we do everything that He does not like. He is not like us sinners and we are not like Him in His pure holiness and righteousness. But He *agaped* us all the same by sending His only Son to die on the cross for our sins.
- 4) This is why Jesus could say to the disciples in **John 15:12**: *My command is this - love each other as I have loved you*. And this is also why John tells us in **verses 11 and 12** of our passage: *Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another*. The implication of God's love for us, therefore, is that God expects us to extend to others the same *mercy* and *grace* that He has shown to us. This means that He expects us to decide that although we do not like someone for whatever reason, we will love him or her by deciding with our will to do actions that demonstrate love to them by being kind to them, being generous to them, being patient with them, being gentle with them, forgiving them, and so on. Biblically speaking, as we do these things to and for this person, although we do not like them at all, we are *loving* them.
- 5) The Lord expects us to be able to do this based on what John writes here in **verses 12 and 13**: *But if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of His Spirit*. In other words, when we were born again, the Holy Spirit of God who comes to in-dwell us imparts into our lives the very life of Christ that empowers us to love others, to *agape* others, like Him.
- 6) This is why in **Gal. 5:22** the first item on Paul's list of the fruit of the Holy Spirit is *Agape*, the love of God. Fruit; the result of the Holy Spirit living and working in our lives to impart to us the character of Christ. And this is why John ends our passage with these words in **verses 19-21**: *We love because He first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And He has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister*.

- 7) Here, John is echoing the Lord's words in **John 15:17** when Jesus said: *My command is this: Love each other.* It is a *command* to us, not a *suggestion*. This, my dear brothers and sisters, is the full *implication* for us of the love of God.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I hope you can see how these **3I's** in this passage give us first, an *insight* into the love of God, second, the supreme *illustration* of the love of God, and third, the *implications* for us of the love of God.

The Apostle John, in a number of places in his Gospel, refers to himself as *the disciple whom Jesus loved*. By this phrase, John did not mean that the Lord loved him more than He loved the other disciples, as some Bible readers have mistakenly thought. What John meant to convey with these words was his own overwhelming sense of God's love for him personally that permeates all his NT writings. This is why Bible scholars often refer to him as the *Apostle of love*.

In **John 20:8-9** John narrates the story of how on resurrection Sunday he and Peter run to see for themselves the empty tomb of Jesus. In this narrative John tells us that when he witnessed that empty tomb, and he understood that Christ had risen from the dead, he fully and finally believed in Christ as the Messiah. I suggest to you that John also then, fully understood the amazing love of God for him displayed in the death and resurrection of Christ. John wrote his epistles and his Gospel as an old man more than fifty years after the ascension of Christ but his overwhelming sense of God's love still shines through all his writings. Listen to what he wrote in **1 John 3:1 (KJV)**: *Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us!* This is: *Look, look at this incredible love with which God has loved us!*

I suggest to you this morning that, like John, you and I too, need to be so deeply gripped by God's divine love demonstrated to us in Christ's work on the cross for us that it radically transforms both our relationship with Him and with everyone else in our lives.

Let me end by telling you about when I first fell in love.

This is why I believe that we will all do well to make as our own this prayer that Paul prayed for the Ephesian Christians in **Eph. 3:17-19**: *And I pray that your roots may go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love; so that you will be able to feel and understand, as all God's children should, how long, how wide, how deep, and how high his love really is; and to experience this love for yourselves.*

Let us pray.

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June 12th 2019.*