

The Beloved Love

1 John 4:7-11 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹ In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Tertullian was a Christian who lived around A.D. 200. He wrote a number of books which are still with us today. In one of those books, he begins to describe what makes Christians different from the rest of Roman society. He gives the distinguishing marks of Christians, the peculiarities. After describing briefly how they worship, and how they administer themselves, he says this:

“But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. ‘See,’ they say, ‘how they love one another,how they are ready even to die for one another.’” Here was a watching world looking on, and the observation they made was “Behold how they love each other.”

This has always been, and always will be, the distinguishing marks of the true Christian. True Christians love one another. That's the focus in these verses here in I John 4:7-11.

John continues to give us the signs of eternal life. As you have noticed, he repeats himself. He keeps talking about what Christians believe, how Christians behave and how Christians love. Christians believe in Christ as the God-man, as Christ. Christians walk in the light and obey God's commandments. Christians love one another. So, here in chapter 4, we come to his last cycle on the matter of what and whom Christians love and why. And it is John's most concentrated look at the loves of a Christian.

In this section, John is going to again make loving one another a test of eternal life. To do so, he is going to give us the requirement, and the illustration; the mandate, and the model. God's family has a standard for acting towards one another, and God Himself set the standard. God was the initiator and frontrunner. So we're going to see two things: First, he is going to show us that God's children love each other. Second, he is going to show how God has loved His children.

I. God's Children Love One Another v7-8

1 John 4:7-8 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

John exhorts us in verse 7, beloved, let us love one another. This is not quite a command; it is an exhortation, an urging on his part. Come, John says, let us love one another. Notice he is already practising what he is preaching, because he calls his readers “beloved” - loved ones. I love you, says John, and let us love one another.

This is something for all of us. “Let us.” This is not just the apostles, not just spiritual leaders. The exhortation is to all who call themselves Christians. And this is something for all of us. Let us love one another. No one is excluded from this. All in the body of Christ are to be loved by us.

Now what is the reason John gives us for this call to love one another? Is it the fact that greater love will produce more unity and oneness of purpose? Well, it will certainly do that, but that is not the reason John gives. Is it the fact that love will create a cohesion, which will mean greater cooperation and effectiveness in ministry? Well, loving one another will do that, but that is not the reason John gives.

What is the reason John gives us for loving one another? Here it is: “For love is of God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.”

John says, in line with the whole epistle, that loving is the sign that you are truly saved. Loving one another is a matter of identification with God. This is about whose family you are in, whose nature is within you, who you belong to and identify with. This is not simply a practical matter of making the church a more unified people when they work together. This is a doctrinal matter of identifying who is actually in the church. Because according to verse 8, if you do not love, you are not part of God's family.

How is this so? Why is loving one another such a test of whether or not you belong to God? John gives us the answer: **Love is of God**, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Love finds its source in God Himself. The origin of love is God.

In verse 8, John becomes more explicit. He says the one not loving has not known God, because God is love. What an earth-trembling statement – God is love. Now don't be misled, to say that God is love does not mean that love is God. In other words, John is not saying, all that love is, is what God is. He is not saying that God is love and love alone. Scripture also says God is light, God is Spirit, God is a consuming fire, the Lord is holy, and the Lord is righteous. What he is saying is that God in His very nature is love. Love is not merely something God does. Love is something God is, He is loving within Himself. It is His way; it is His inclination; it is His habit of heart, if you will, to love. From eternity past, God the Father loved God the Son; God the Son loved God the Father, and the love between them was carried and expressed in God the Spirit.

When God chose to create, He was lavishing love upon His pristine universe. God loves, God also hates, but His hate is a reflex to His love. He hates what threatens or destroys what He loves. John is grounding this argument not in practical matters of church life, but in theology. And here's the point: when this God of love has offspring, when God has children, what do you expect those children to be like?

It is amazing to see traits in one's own children that you did not teach them and they did not learn from their environment. It is something in how you are made that you pass on. As a child, I was methodical to the point of being obsessive – not something I want to pass on. But my son likes to lay his clothes out for the next day in a very methodical fashion. We didn't ask him to do that, or train him to do that. But he somehow inherited that. Something of my nature, of my disposition, my inclinations, were literally passed on through the physical and spiritual miracle of birth.

John is saying. God has a nature, and this nature is one of love. When God passes on His nature to human beings in the act of regeneration, when people are born again by the Spirit of God, so that God's life now lives in them, what is of necessity part of that nature? Love. Everyone who loves is born of God. Or to put it another way, everyone born of God loves.

The Christianity of the Bible is not about picking up a new set of habits. It is about a divine miracle - the implantation of a new heart – a new set of loves. These need to be grown, and fostered, to be sure, but this is not simply about nice people becoming nicer, and mean-spirited people mellowing. This is about something from above which is now within you. And if it is there, as surely as a child's DNA can be traced back to its parents, so a person born of God has love written into his spiritual DNA.

1 John 3:14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.

Loving one another is proof of regeneration. Loving one another is also proof of sanctification. John

says in verse 7, “Everyone who loves is born of God, and **knows** God” And then in verse 8: “He that does not love, does not know God”. This is not any kind of knowing. This is the knowing of personal relationship.

You are born into this family, and through a process of spiritual growth, you come to increasingly know God for who He is. You know Him as a person. You know what he loves and hates, what He desires, what He is doing, what He aims at, what He has done, what He has promised. And if you have come to know Him through conversion, then that knowledge must grow. And the more you know Him, the more you will reflect Him. Our children slowly but surely pick up our accents, our mannerisms, our sayings, and our attitudes. In fact, a strange phenomenon is how often aged married couples sometimes begin to resemble on another.

How could we spend years with the Lord, who is love, and be recipients of that love, and experience it new every morning, and sing of it, and pray with it, and never love our fellow Christians? It's impossible. Put simply, the beloved love. Those loved by God, love like He does.

The ultimate test of our salvation is not simply our profession of faith, but our inward loving of what God loves. It is possible to be absolutely correct and yet not be a Christian. It is possible to champion the faith in word, and yet deny the faith by the very bitterness with which you do it.

The test of faith is vital – your **orthodoxy**. Do you believe what God says is true? John keeps reminding us to believe what God says is true – that Jesus is the Christ, Jesus is the Son of God, Jesus came in the flesh. The test of your practise is probably more vital – orthodoxy. Do you do what God says is good? John keeps reminding us that Christians obey God’s commandments. Christians walk in the light but deeper and most ultimate is the test of your loves – **orthopathy/orthopiety**. Do you love what God says is beautiful? Do you love what He loves?

John 8:42 ⁴² Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me.

God loves His people. God loves His Bride. And if you hate what He loves as a habit of life, the Bible says, you don't have His nature within you, and you haven't seen Him. Do you love what God loves, and love it as He loves it?

That brings us to the second point which John wants to make. John now wants to prove the fact that God is love, that love comes from God. He wants to illustrate this truth that God has loved us so that we see what that means. We are to see how it is that God loves.

II. God Has Loved His Children vv9-10

In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Here we learn what it means that God loved us. We learn what the pattern is for our love for one another. We learn how God has loved, and in what way He wants us to love. And what we learn is that God's love is most concentrated, and most visible in the gospel. In the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, we find God's love painted in its brightest colours, God's clarified for us like a pristine lens, God's love illuminated to us like the sun at noonday.

We see at least three things about God's love in these verses.

God's love to us was made known.

John tells us that this love was **manifested** towards us. This love was revealed, it was shown, and it was acted out and made known. An important and fundamental truth about God's love is that God's love did not remain hidden. God's love was not merely a temptation in His heart to be nice towards us. God's affections led to actions.

What was in God's heart towards: the way He desired fellowship with us, the way He valued us as mirrors of His own image, the way He rejoiced in us as the work of His hands, the way He foreknew us as His companion – His Bride, did not remain something hidden. God's love went public. God's love was fleshed out and made known.

1 John 3:16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

John 3:16 ¶ "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God's love is more than intention; it is demonstration. Love is active; love is creative; love is benign. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13: "Love is kind."

One of the tests for our love for one another is: has it been revealed? Has it gone from intention to action? Has it gone from wishing to acting? Has my love become obviously manifested? Now that is not the same as asking, does the person I love recognise my love as love, for as we know, recognising love is a matter of receptivity? Billions of people do not know that God loves them and yet He does. Many of us as believers have doubted God's love. The problem was not God's love, but the state of our hearts. The same is true for our love for others. Our love might well be misinterpreted, misconstrued, misunderstood, or hardly noticed. But what we need to ask is, has my love for others been like God's love in that it has gone beyond a wish that others be happy, or a good feeling about the idea of love, and entered into the real world of other people's lives?

That's why John says in the same letter:

1 John 3:18 ¹⁸ My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

God's love to us was good in return for evil

Notice two very important statements here about our state. John says that that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.

If Jesus had to come into the world that we might live, what does that imply about us? We were dead. We were as responsive to God as your child's stuffed toys are to them. And it wasn't a quiet kind of death. We were active, living rebels, pursuing that death.

Ephesians 2:1-3 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³ among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

How attractive do you think that made us to God? How much fellowship was He receiving from us at the time? What kind of glory was He getting from these walking corpses? God's love was His being good to us, though we had been evil towards Him. "But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us:

“Ephesians 2:5 ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), “

Second, notice John says in verse 10 that Jesus was sent to be the propitiation for our sins. That means Jesus came to be the sin offering for us. What does that imply about us? We were guilty sinners. We were fugitives from God's law. We had criminal records. We were traitors and outlaws, living on borrowed time.

How much good was God receiving from us as sinners, evildoers and traitors? If what we deserved was what Jesus received on the cross, what kind of people were we before God?

Romans 5:7-8 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Third, notice what John says about us in verse 10. It is not that we loved God, but that God loved us. We didn't love God, and if we didn't love Him what does that mean about us? We hated Him. We loved the idea of God, as long as He was faraway Creator, Cosmic Santa Claus, icon of blessing on all my pleasures and lusts – but be honest, what did you first think of the idea that God hated sin and would punish it? Did you love that God? We hated Him, and yet He loved us.

This love was not a growing affection for one another. It was not a reciprocal love between equals. It was not that God loved us because we had begun to show Him love. The Bible is explicit: God loved us. God's love was unilateral. God's love was based in His own heart. God's love began when we were furthest from anything that would please Him. He loved us; He chose to love us; He loved us when it was completely one-sided.

One theologian has pointed out that love is made up of willing good towards the beloved. To love someone is to will his good, not his destruction. You desire only the good of that person. And God's kind of love is to will good to people who are returning to him only the evil of hatred and rebellion, and because they are dead, cannot do otherwise.

Now stop and consider how much of the love we grant others is not in spite of who they are, but because of who they are. If they are kind to me, or have the same interests, or speak politely to me; if they are good to my children, and are generally pleasant company; if they are nice-looking, and within a respectable economic bracket – then I love them.

But if they are ever difficult, or rude, or obnoxious, or intrusive, or loud, or pushy, or impatient, or irritable, or dressed funny, or embarrassing to be seen with, or poor conversationalists, then I have enough reason to not love them. No, God loved us by willing good to us in response to evil. This is the love of God: it is demonstrable. It is gracious and gives us what is good for us, even though we don't deserve it. And there is a third aspect to this love of God for His children:

God's love to us was at painful personal cost

“that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world”

God sent His only begotten Son. What does that term *only* begotten mean? Well, it translates just one word, but that word is so filled with meaning that the translators have felt it best to use two English words to communicate it. On the one hand, it means unique, one-and-only but on the other hand, it means "of the same kind" We would say 'of the same genes'. Jesus Christ was the unique Son of the Father, and He was of the same essence with the Father. The Son was always the perfect radiance and expression of the Father. And before He came to the world, He was with the Father.

That's why it says, He was sent. God sent Him, because He was with the Father.

Being a self-sufficient God, there is nothing God could give us in creation which would cost Him. Anything He gave us, He made. He could make it out of nothing again. He is never depleted; He does not have limited resources. God could give us the whole universe, and it wouldn't really cost Him, because He could make another one just as easily.

The only way that the self-sufficient God could sacrifice, would be if He gave up Himself. If God Himself suffered the loss of God – this would be the ultimate act of love. There is no higher act, no more valuable act of love that has ever been done or will be done, than when God the Father, gave up God the Son for the redemption of sinners.

Amazing Love! How Can It Be! That Thou My God Shouldst Die For Me!

God sent His Son – His one and only, His unique Son into the world. God sent His Son on a death mission. God sent His Son to enter a world fallen and broken and decaying. And His Son willingly took that mission, having in His heart exactly the same love for us as the Father.

You've no doubt heard the story of John Griffith. Griffith was a young man with a young wife, whose dreams were shattered by the stock market crash of 1929. With no money he found a job operating a drawbridge over the Mississippi river. He would sit in a control room and lower the bridge for trains to cross over the river, and then raise it so that ships and barges could pass down below on the river.

The years went by, with John Griffith living with little in the way of hope and optimism for the future. One bright spot was his son, who was now 8, and a growing bond was developing between them. On one occasion, he let his son come with him to work. His son sat spellbound as he watched his father lower and raise this massive structure.

Later on, they sat by the riverbank enjoying some packed sandwiches, and talking about all the destinations of the trains and boats. Suddenly, John was shocked to hear a whistle. It was an approaching train, on schedule. He had completely lost track of time. He knew he needed to get back to the control room quickly, to lower the drawbridge. He told his son to wait at the river side, and rushed back up to the control room as fast as he could.

He got into the room with a minute to spare. As was protocol, he looked to see if there were any obstructions to lowering the bridge. He looked across where the bridge would land, he looked down, and then his heart almost stopped because caught in the gears of the bridge was his son. His son had tried to follow him, and had fallen. He could see his son was struggling to get free, and couldn't, because his clothing had wedged into the gears.

John panicked. There was only a minute before the train came. He had to get his son out. He thought of throwing a rope down to him. He thought of sprinting to the gears, and back. But he knew there was no time. He would never be able to get his son out, and get back to the control room in time to lower the drawbridge. If he saved his son, hundreds of people in that train, would plunge into the river, and die. If he saved those people, the lowering drawbridge would crush his son to death. He could not save one without sacrificing the other.

With an agony, I can barely imagine, John Griffith made the choice to lower the drawbridge, save the people and give up his son. He gave up his son, so that the people could live.

And while that story has similarities to what God did in giving up His Son, the differences are, in

fact, what makes God's sacrifice so much greater. God was not caught off guard. God did not unwillingly give up His Son. Christ was not accidentally on the cross. No, it was planned. The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. The Son laid down His life to give us life and as the propitiation for our sins. This is God's love: one of painful personal sacrifice.

How do Christians love one another? At painful, personal cost. And yet we do not meditate on the cost, because of the love we have. If God's love has been shed abroad in our heart, if we have been born of God and know God, then we will love each other at great cost to ourselves. We will love each other, not just in our intentions, but in our actions. We will love each other even when we are not lovable.

John summarises all of this for us in verse 11: Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. If God has loved us in this way, we are obligated to love each other in the same way. If God has saved all of us with this love, we owe it one another to love one another in the same way.

So, when someone in the body of Christ irritates me, what do I do? I say, if God so loved me, a source of great irritation to Him, I also ought to love this one, whom God loves. And when someone insults me, or fails me, what do I do? I say, if God so loved me, a source of great failure, and a great insult to God, I also ought to love this one whom God loves. And when someone slanders me or gossips about me, what do I do? I say, if God so loved me, someone who spoke evil of God with my lips and life, I also ought to love this one, whom God loves.

You see when I take verses 9 and 10, I see Christ's death and Christ's life. In other words, every Christian you meet is a Christian for whom Christ died, and every Christian is a Christian in whom Christ lives. I love them because Christ died for them and lives in them. If God so loved them, I also ought to love them.

John 13:34-35 ³⁴ "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

“Behold, how they love one another!” This ought to be said of us, because God has so loved us.