

1 John 4:7-12

Is God Love? Sermon

### **1. Intro: Where do we get our definition of love from? What are our def. of love?**

Good morning, today we are going to be asking the question “Is God Love?”. Now for some of you the answer might seem obvious. Of course God is love, if there’s one thing everyone agrees on it is that God is love. So the real question is, what does God's love look like? The problem is, we all have our own personal definition of love. You might not think your definition of love is that different, but ask any couple in their first year of marriage and you’ll probably find that their biggest struggle is learning how to love in a way that their spouses find loving. This happens because we all have our own definition of love. Think of how broadly we use the word. I love Torchy’s Tacos and I love my wife. **Think of some other ways we use or define love.** Love is unqualified acceptance: we say “If you loved me you’d accept my choices.” We define love as either a need or a desire to be needed: Robert Frost said “Love is the irresistible desire to be irresistibly desired”. Or we define love as sacrificing our own needs and desires: We say “If you love her let her go.” We define love as a kind of currency “the love you take, is equal to the love you make” (Beatles) We speak of love as tough or free. Love is a language or love is sex. Love is the absence of conflict, of “never having to say you are sorry”. **Our manic definitions of love lead to manic lives in which we are all expecting to be loved in accord with our definitions of love, while trying to figure out how to love others in accord with their definition of love.** This mania comes to us because our definition of love does not come from God. But God can restore us to sane, real, love. We don’t know how to love one another because we do not know love as it is defined and shown perfectly by God. But there is something even worse than not knowing how to love one another. There is a deeper issue of love that is actually the reason we struggle to love one another. When we have a wrong or incomplete definition of love, we don’t really understand how God loves us, and how can we know God if we don’t understand how He love us? And here is what I think the deep problem is. **In our culture we don’t really believe that God is Love, instead we believe that Love is God.** We say the God of the Old Testament must be different than the God of the New Testament because

the God of the Old Testament is angry not loving. We judge our friendships based on how loved, or supported we feel. We judge the health of our marriage by the lack of conflict we experience. We define God, and judge His actions by our own definitions of love and we judge each other based on our personal definitions of love. We place our idea of love above God, and actually worship it instead of God. If the absence of conflict is your definition of love, then you will give all you time, energy, and emotion to ensuring that there is no disturbance of your peace. If your definition of love is unqualified acceptance, then your heart will be broken and cobbled back together by every perceived criticism or complement you receive. Our own idea of love is a cruel love. When we believe Love is God, we hold God accountable to our own definition of Love. Love is not God, God is love, and we need to have our understanding of love completely and only formed by God. We don't know how we are loved or how to love because we don't really know God. This morning we are going to look at 1 John 4:7-12 and see two things: We are going to see how God loves, giving us a true understanding of love, and how God frees us to love one another. Lets begin by reading from 1 John.

**7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 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. 10 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. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.**

## **2. Love is From God**

One of the very first things we see in this passage is that “love is from God”. God is the source and definer of love. How is God the source of love? Because within the Trinity love is perfectly poured out between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Godhead finds perfect satisfaction in its communion and so it has an abundance of love. Only a God like this could be the source of love, because God has perfect community, perfect acceptance within Himself. God is the real source of love because He does not love to gain acceptance. Only a God like this could create a world out of

an abundance of love instead of need, God has all He needs within Himself.

### **3. Love Comes From the Trinity.**

**Love is ultimately from God, it is an outpouring of who He is to His world. God does not love out of a need to be loved.** God loves because He has all He needs within Himself, and He pours out that love to us. So we are left with a question. If love is defined by who God is and what He has done, and if we want to love like God does, how do we know what that love looks like? John answers by saying this in verse 9: **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. 10 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.**

### **4. Two things: Agenda, Love regardless of loveliness.**

In these verses we see two very important things that contradict our understanding of love. **First we see that God's love has an agenda.** Now in our culture that is a loaded word. We actually believe that love should have no agenda right? We believe that love is unqualified acceptance. But even the idea of unqualified acceptance has an agenda doesn't it? When we believe that we are only really loved whenever we are accepted as we are, our agenda is to never be told we are wrong, or that we need to change. If we believe that the only way to show love is to accept everything about someone, we will hide from telling them the truth about where they sin, where they hurt others, where they need to change. Its actually selfish love because we are driven by the desire to not lose their approval. And to take it one step further, to approve of everything about a person, to call all their desires and actions good, is not love its indifference, and indifference is just a polite word for hate. It is hateful to not tell someone that they are sinning, its hateful to tell someone they have hurt others, its hateful to not tell someone of their need for Jesus.

### **5. For/Against- God's Agenda**

**All ideas of love have an agenda, but the agenda of God's love is better.** We are told that God sent His Son into the world "that we might live through him" This flies in the face of our cultural understanding of love that says that love is the full, unqualified acceptance of a person's desires and

behaviors. But accepting and endorsing everything a person does is not love. It is not loving to support the desires and behaviors of a person that leads to hurt or sin. For example, I have two daughters, Bella(3) and Imogen(1 1/2), and when we are getting loaded into the car, if my wife and I aren't watching close enough, without fail, one of them will try to climb into the driver's seat. They've seen Mommy and Daddy up there and they want to be like us and drive the car. But not one of you would consider me a loving father if I put the keys in the ignition, shifted the car into drive, and told them to just make sure to fill up the tank on their way back home. Real love is picking my daughter up, and strapping her down in her carseat for the safety of us all. Even if she is kicking and screaming. Why? Because I want good for my daughters. I want them to be safe. I don't want them to hurt themselves or others just because they have the desire to drive a car. I want them to have life and so my love for my daughters has an agenda. **In the same way God's love for us has an agenda. God is not okay with all the sin, death, and evil in the world. God is a loving God and so He is not okay with our sin, sin that hurts us, hurts others, and hurts His creation.** Actually God is against those things. There are things that you and I do, there are desires that we have that God is against. Not exactly what you were hoping to hear in a sermon about God's love is it? But Consider this quote by Becky Pippert from her book Hope Has Its Reasons. **“Think how we feel when we see someone we love ravaged by unwise actions or relationships. Do we respond with benign tolerance as we might toward strangers? Far from it... Anger isn't the opposite of love. Hate is, and the final form of hate is indifference... God's wrath is not a cranky explosion, but His settled opposition to the cancer... which is eating out the insides of the human race he loves with his whole being.”** God's love is against those things that try to steal His glory, those things that hurt His creation, those things that are not life but are death to us. We're not crazy about this idea of love are we, that God would be against us, our wrong desires and actions. We find the idea of love as against something very hard to stomach. **Instead we have a false idea of love that says “love would never contradict my beliefs, love would never challenge me on how I spend my time and money, love would never confront my vanity and addiction to what others think. Love would never confront me about the mania that I live in because I don't understand love”** Real love, as shown by God, is against our sin.

## **6. Jesus is God for us!**

If God is against our sin, against the “cancer” that is destroying humanity, then He is also for us. In Jesus we see how God is for us. The Bible describes Jesus as the second Adam, the second representative of our race. Where Adam failed in obeying God, in stewarding God’s creation, in worshipping God, Jesus triumphed. Jesus lived in perfect relationship to God and to man. Jesus lived a completely righteous life on behalf of the human race, Jesus did what we and Adam could not do. On the cross Jesus suffers the loving punishment of God for all sin death and evil. Jesus atoned for our sin. Jesus, who had no sin, took on our sin, and suffered the punishment we deserved, reconciling us to God, something we and Adam could not do. And with His resurrection Jesus conquers and crushes sin, death and evil, setting us free from its power, giving us new life in His life. This is what it means for Jesus to be the second adam, the second representative of our race. This is what it means for Jesus to be for us. At the cross of Christ we see a perfectly loving God , who is lovingly against our sin and lovingly for us in Christ. At the cross we see a God who in perfect love brings justice to bear on our sin, and who in perfect love bears the punishment for our sin. **So the first thing we see about God’s love is this: At the cross we see that God’s love has an agenda, and that agenda is against our evil and for our good.**

## **7. The Love of God is not Based on our loveliness.**

**The second thing we see is that God’s love is not based on the loveliness of those He loves.** John tell us in verse 10 **“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.”** God does not love us because we have loved him first. We have not done something to earn God’s love. Actually if we look at the verse closely we see that God’s love is poured out on underserving people. The Son is sent because of our sin, not because of our goodness. God sends the Son to renew the world because of His deep love for His creation. He doesn’t send Jesus because His creation has made itself lovely enough to deserve His love. And this is one of the hardest truths there is to believe: God loves you first. God’s love is not a response to how well you love others. God does not first require your love as a security deposit before He will love you. Instead God loves us first,

and how does He love us? By giving himself as an atoning sacrifice for our Sins. In verse 10 we see that Jesus was sent to be a propitiation for our sins. If there is a churchier word than propitiation I don't know what it is. What is propitiation? Propitiation is what Christ did to atone for our sins. It is Christ taking the wrath of God upon himself that we deserved. It is Christ being the representative of humanity, righteous before God. It is Christ taking God's wrath and earning for us God's favor. It is Christ atoning us and reconciling us to God.

### **More Propitiation! More Atonement:**

#### **8. God's love is connected to the Sacrifice of Jesus.**

**We see here in verse 10 that God's love is not dependent on our loveliness, but is dependent on His very nature as a loving God. But we also see that God's love is not poured out apart from Christ.** Apart from Christ, without the atoning reconciling work of Jesus, God is against us. We can not experience God's love apart from experiencing the atoning work of Jesus on the cross. The only way to know God's love is to receive it through the forgiveness earned by Christ on your behalf. If you have not received God's love through Jesus, right now I'd call you to turn to God, repent of chasing all the false loves of this world, and receive His perfect love in Christ.

#### **9. Love as We Have Been Loved**

**1 John 4 tells us that God's love has an agenda against our evil and for our good and that God's love is based on His nature not our**

**own.** But 1 John also tells us that now that we have seen and experienced how God has loved us, that we should then go and love others as we have been loved. Love with an agenda against evil and for the good of others, regardless of whether or not they deserve it. Loving like God does- that can be incredibly intimidating can't it? Loving without demand, loving sacrificially, loving with the intent of seeing a person pursue goodness and holiness instead of pursuing hurt and destruction. Loving whether or not we are loved in return. Loving without a scorecard. We all have our love scorecards don't we? Did he notice my new haircut? Did he come to my show?, Did they remember my birthday on facebook? Did they provide a vegetarian option? Did they do the dishes this time? Our fear and pride get in the way of truly loving others, because honestly, fear and pride are ways we love ourselves. So how can we be drawn out of self love into the love of others?

#### **10. We Love Out of Identity- Identity flows from the atonement.**

Let's look at the very first word in verse 7: "**Beloved**" John reminds us of our name in Christ. Our name is one who is loved. Before John ever tells us to love like God loves, he reminds us that our identity is one who is loved by God. This new identity of "beloved" is the root of our ability to love one another, because it uproots our fear and pride and replaces it with the atoning work of God. We do not have to fear to love, because the worst things that could happen to us have been taken on by Jesus at the cross. We do not have to fear rejection, because Jesus has carried ultimate rejection for us, and has also accepted us into the family of God. We will never be rejected by God, because of Christ, and so we don't have to fear the rejection of others. We don't have to fear not loving one another perfectly because God is for us in Christ and we have been loved perfectly by Christ. We are freed from demanding perfect love from others because we already have perfect love from God! Jesus took all our judgement at the cross and so we have no judgement to fear. We have been reconciled to God! If we do not have to fear judgement from God, why would we fear judgement from one another?! Be perfected by God's love by believing, cherishing, trusting that it is enough. God has given His Son to you, what more could He give you to show His love?

#### **11. Identity Drives our Fear and Pride Away.**

Our identity as beloved by God drives away our fear in loving others. It does this because as God is infinitely satisfied in Himself, so to can we be infinitely satisfied with His love. Our identity as “**beloved**” also addresses our pride. John tells us twice in chapter 4 that we love because we are first loved by God. You do not have to demand love from others because you have love from God. You do not have to protect your pride by only loving in ways you think you are good at, because God loves others perfectly, and He is perfecting His love in you as He calls you to love others. God loves you and makes you lovely, you do not have to make yourself lovable. Our new identity as beloved by God, heals our manic lives. It heals our manic definitions of love. It gives us peace in Christ and it frees us to love.

## **12. Practical Ways To Grow In Love**

If in Christ we are freed from fear and pride to love one another, then what are some practical ways for us to share the love of God with one another?

1. First it was really hard to think of ways we might be falling short of loving one another well. Be encouraged! God is working in us and causing us to love one another well. Two weeks ago we heard story after story of God’s grace and how people are being changed by the love of God shown in community.
2. Love for leaders
  - a. Pray and follow the elders. Pray for Jonathan, Tim, and Jesse. They love you so much and satan hates them so much.
  - b. Pray and encourage your CG and other ministry leaders. Share about Matt Irving always intentionally praying for me. Share how I know the East Side is behind me.
  - c. Love and honor your CG hosts. Don’t leave the house if the kitchen is messy. Thank them. Show up early and set up for them. Give them a week of by paying for professional house cleaning. Don’t let them go a whole year of hosting without a break!
3. Pursue those on the borders of community. Christ has pursued you. Don’t let people disappear from your CG. Let’s pursue those who might show up on sunday and not know anyone and week after week, they come but aren’t connected to community. This isn’t the leaders responsibility. It’s a family issue. The love of the Father, through the Son, frees us from self-love to love others, put them first. You might consider a few defeaters to

this kind of love: 1) technology 2) leisure 3) fear  
Meet a new person every week!

**Conclusion:**

City life, let us love one another in these ways and many more out of the great freedom and satisfaction we have in the love of God. Let us love not as the world loves, which is mania, chasing after our own desires, demanding to be loved according to our own definition of love. Be free to love without fear because God loves perfectly. Be free to love without pride, because even though you were unlovely in sin God has made you lovely in Christ.