

# God is Love

1 JOHN 4:7-14

Baxter T. Exum (#1396)  
Four Lakes Church of Christ  
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This morning I'd like for us to return to our study of the New Testament book of 1 John! We started this series back on the first Sunday of November last year, and when we started, I just briefly mentioned that this would be an extended series and that we would have a number of breaks along the way, and I believe we have seen that to be the case. We have had a number of guest speakers, we've had a change of plans due to some extremely cold weather in December (followed by the holidays), we've had at least one song service, I've been out of town the past two weeks, and so today we get back to it with what I believe is the tenth lesson in this series. And back when we started in November, I mentioned that while most of the lessons we study here go back to requests from various members of the congregation, this series has basically been MY request. In the "task list" I keep on my phone, the reminder to myself was that we needed to have more sermons on "Jesus," and we need to have more sermons on "love." So, as I kept thinking about that over several months, I kept coming back to 1 John – an amazing message from the oldest living apostle, written in the late 80's or early 90's AD, a very personal message from John on JESUS and LOVE!

So, we get back to it this morning with 1 John 4:7-14 (p. 1908). And should point out that the only reason I'm using this picture as a background is to make my sister comfortable this morning. I took this on one of our hikes together back in October. So, I put this here in case she misses the rainforest. It has nothing to do with the love of God other than the fact that God made everything you see up here (which is awesome).

But, as you might see in the heading in your edition of the Bible (1 John 4:7-14), the main idea in this paragraph (the main message) is that GOD IS LOVE. We live in a world where we certainly need some guidance and advice concerning what love really is, because in many ways, love can be a very confusing subject. We look around us in the popular media, and it's quite clear that the world has no idea what love really is. And so there is a tremendous value to us going back this morning to study not only the definition of love, but also the source of love, the ultimate demonstration of love, and what all of this means for those of us assembled here this morning in Madison, Wisconsin. What does God want us to know about love? How do we love those who are not easy to love? How do we love those who don't really want to be loved? How do we love when we don't really feel like loving? How do we love those who refuse to love us back?

I hope we will pay special attention to what John says here, because in verses 7-14 (if I have counted correctly), John uses various forms of the word "**love**" at least 13 times! And I think you will agree with me

when I say that we need more love in this world. We need much deeper love between husbands and wives. We need more love between each other as brothers and sisters in Jesus. We need more love at work. We need more love in this city. We need more love in our families. So, as we think about love, let us please look together at 1 John 4:7-14,

***<sup>7</sup> Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. <sup>9</sup> By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup> No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. <sup>13</sup> By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. <sup>14</sup> We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.***

We don't have time to look at this passage in great detail, but as we allow the word of God to work in our hearts this morning, I'd like to make several observations based on what we've read here.

**I. And the first idea I want us to notice in this passage is that GOD IS LOVE.**

So we start with this statement, **"God is love."** Not, "God is merciful" (which he is), not, "God is all-powerful" (which he is), not, "God is gracious" (which he is), but **"God is love."** And I would emphasize here that John is not just saying that God is loving, he is not just saying that God loves, he's not saying that love is a quality that God has, but John is saying that **"God is love."** Love is what God is! God is love itself! Everything God does, everything that he is, all of his attributes flow from this truth that he is love.

The question, then, is: What is love? Just for fun, I pulled up [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com) as I was working on today's lesson (to give us some idea of what people today think love is), and I would share their first definition – LOVE (a noun), "a profoundly tender, passionate affection for another person," and then the second definition, "a feeling of warm personal attachment or deep affection, as for a parent, child, or friend." According to the world around us, then, love is primarily a feeling. Love is when we FEEL some kind of tender or passionate FEELING for another person, a warm personal attachment, a deep affection. And I'm not arguing with that definition as being inaccurate. To most people today, that is what love is. Love is a feeling.

However, that is not what John has in mind here. As we have learned a number of times through this book, John uses a rather unique word that happens to be translated into English here as **"love."** We think about the word love today. We use it in different ways. I love bacon, and I love my wife! Those are slightly different concepts! In the same way, the ancient Greeks also had different thoughts behind various words for love, and the word John uses here is a word that refers to a sacrificial kind of love, a decision to do what is best for another person – not necessarily because we like the person, not because we have some kind of a warm feeling toward this other person, not because this person has done anything to deserve it, but because this thing we are doing needs to be done, because this is what is needed at the time, even if there is a sacrifice involved on our part.

So here at the beginning, we need to make this contrast. On one hand, most people today think of love as some kind of a mushy feeling we have toward another person – love is a feeling – and as we have seen, this is the dictionary definition of love. On the other hand, though, as we look at 1 John, as we find that God is love,

we find that the love John refers to here is not a feeling at all; instead, love is a decision, a decision to do what is best for another person, regardless of whether that person deserves it, and regardless of whether we have any kind of deep, emotional connection to that other person.

So I hope we a problem here. Our society says, "I will hang out with you, I will stay married to you, I will be nice to you," or whatever, "as long as we have this mutual feeling of 'love' between us." What God models for us, though, goes far beyond that!

II. **And that leads us to a second observation based on this passage, and that is: GOD DEMONSTRATED HIS GREAT LOVE BY SENDING JESUS TO THIS EARTH TO DIE ON THE CROSS FOR OUR SINS.**

So, in Jesus, the love of God is demonstrated. We look at Jesus, and this is what God's love actually looks like. And again, we're making that distinction between feeling and action. Over in Romans 5, Paul explains that, *"...while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.... But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."* Paul explains, then, that God didn't wait to see some admirable quality in our lives that made us worth dying for, but he sent Jesus *"while we were yet sinners," "while we were [still] enemies,"* of God. God loved us when all of us were very much unlovable.

And that is what John means when he says (in verse 10) that Jesus is the *"propitiation"* for our sins. He is the *"atoning sacrifice,"* he is the one who died in our place. He came into this world that he had made and willingly died the most horrible death we could possibly imagine, and he did it for us – it wasn't an accident, it wasn't because he got sick, this didn't catch the Lord by surprise, but he came here and died for us on purpose, for us.

And I believe it is truly hard for us to imagine what it meant for Jesus to leave heaven. After all, heaven is where all of us want to be. Most of you know that we've done some thinking about heaven in our family over the past several weeks and months. Heaven is where we want to go. As we sometimes sing at camp, "Heaven is a wonderful place, filled with glory and grace" (I can hardly say these words without singing them). Heaven is a perfect place, full of peace and love, no sin, no darkness, no hatred or pride, no temptation, no anger, no sickness, no death. Heaven is where we want to be. Heaven is our mission in this life. Heaven is the destination. But think about this: Jesus did not "want" to go to heaven – he was already there! Jesus was together with his Father in this perfect place, but he chose to leave that beautiful place to come here! Jesus willingly stepped into this world full of sin and pain. While he was here, he brought a little bit of heaven with him, didn't he? He healed people, he brought people back from the dead, he fed people, he showed us what it means to love, and yet in the end, the people he came to save ended up nailing him to the cross, and he willingly gave up his life on that cross. From time to time, I will read or hear something about Jesus' blood being "spilled" on the cross. I object to that! His blood was not "spilled," it was "poured out." His blood was "poured out" as a sacrifice, it was intentional.

And that is our second observation this morning: God demonstrated his love in sending Jesus. It's the kind of love that holds nothing back. And this is who God is. God is love! And his love showed itself on the cross.

I don't know whether any of you have ever showed love to somebody, but they didn't show it back. Have you been there? Maybe we've tried to demonstrate our own love by doing something for another person, but that person has totally ignored us. Or worse, maybe they responded in a very negative way. Maybe you did something nice for a spouse, and they didn't get it. Maybe you did something nice for somebody in your family, and they responded with some hateful comment. Maybe you sacrificed something of value, but the person you sacrificed for responded by complaining. If you've been there, then rest assured, God knows how that feels. Because isn't that what we've done to him? He died for us, **"while we were yet sinners."** He sent Jesus, knowing that a vast majority of this world would not care. But he loved anyway, because **"God is love."**

We can look at God's word, and we find that marriage is the human relationship that probably comes closest to helping us understand what Jesus did. You want to know what it means to sacrifice and have that sacrifice not be appreciated? Go get married! In Ephesians 5:25, for example, Paul said, **"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her."** We look at those vows that many of us made when we were married. There is a reason for that solemn ceremony in front of many witnesses, in front of our closest friends and family. There is a reason why we take a solemn oath and sign on the dotted line. We promised to love each other in a sacrificial way – in sickness and in health, in prosperity and adversity, for richer or poorer, in joy or in sorrow, so long as we both shall live. Those vows we made before God and witnesses mean that we promised to love this other person in a sacrificial way – not just up to the point where we no longer feel loved ourselves, but we promised to love, even if it means giving up something to love the other person, making a decision to do what that person needs us to do, even if we don't feel like it. There are times (even in a marriage) when we might even need to deal with hatred, sickness, financial ruin, trouble with kids, trouble with in-laws, and on and on and on. The Bible teaches that Jesus understands. He knows what it means to sacrifice.

As I prepared these thoughts on love, I went back to one of the most recent weddings I've done. I don't do too many these days. But this one was back in 2010. And in that ceremony, I pointed out that love can be a struggle sometimes, and I used the example of the church in Ephesus, a church that had basically fallen out of love with the Lord. And I said (back in 2010), "Sometimes, that can happen in a marriage, as two people slowly grow apart and start to simply coexist in the same house." I gave those words as a warning. The Lord's instruction to Ephesus, though, applies to us today. As Jesus told the church in Ephesus, and as I encouraged the couple getting married, that if this ever happens, **"Go back and do the deeds you did at first."** In other words, think back to when you were dating, and do today what you did then. And please notice: Jesus did not necessarily say, "feel the way you did then," but he said, **"Do the things you did at the beginning."** Love is a decision, and sometimes we have to do things for the sake of our marriage that we might not feel like doing, like being nice, and so on! Sometimes we need to ask ourselves, "Would I like being married to me?" And then we need to turn around and treat our partner by the Golden Rule – treating them as we ourselves would like to be treated. But the idea here is that love requires sacrifice (even when we don't feel like it), and we are inspired and motivated by what Jesus did for us.

### III. As we go back to our text, I would make a third observation, and that is: **GOD'S LOVE IS TO BE REFLECTED IN OUR LOVE FOR EACH OTHER.**

This is how the paragraph starts in verse 7, **"Beloved, let us love one another."** John continues the thought in verse 8 – if we don't love, then we don't really know God. He continues in verse 11, **"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."** In fact, 27 times in the Bible, we are told to **"love one another."** Not just "tolerate" each other, not just "put up with" each other, but we are to **"love one another."** Based on what

Jesus did for us on the cross, we turn around and treat others the same way – we sacrifice, we give up what we want, and we do what is best for those around us.

In Matthew 25, Jesus made the point that we ought to be able to see him in **“the least of these.”** We ought to be able to see Jesus among the hungry, among those who do not have proper clothing, among those who are in prison. I think about those three categories, and we have programs here at this congregation aimed at providing food, clothing, and even an opportunity for study and fellowship for those in prison. A month or two ago, my wife happened to mention in passing that some of the students at her school needed lotion, and one of our members went out and bought a bunch of lotion. As a dad, I think: When my kids have dry skin in the winter, we just add it to the list, we get what we need, and life goes on. But there are kids in Madison schools whose skin just cracks and bleeds. As a dad, I just can’t fathom that. But these kids either don’t have parents, perhaps there are some parents who don’t care or don’t see, but there are many who just can’t – they have no way of providing for that need (no money, no car to get to the store, no store nearby, no time, or whatever). And so, one of our people heard that and said, “I can do something about that.” That is what John is talking about here – the fact that God is love, the fact that his love is shown through the cross, and the fact that his love is then reflected by God’s people to the world around us.

Jesus spent time with widows and orphans. He spent time with foreigners, with those who were just passing through. He spent time with prostitutes and sinners (even to the point where it affected his reputation). Is there somebody we just can’t stand being around? Jesus would spend time with that person. At Tracy’s memorial service this past Thursday, I saw somebody who just wears me out. Do you have somebody who wears you out? Well, Thursday, I just couldn’t do it. I wasn’t feeling well. I was tired. And I just could not interact with this person. There are no harsh feelings there. There’s no hatred or anything. This person just wears me out. I mentioned this to Keola as we were driving home, and Keola said, “Oh yeah, I sat down and talked to her for a while.” And I said, “Thank you for being Jesus to that woman!” I just couldn’t do it. So I am preaching this sermon to myself first. Jesus spent time with people who wore him out!

Since God is love, it is important, then, that we reflect that love to the people around us, that we not avoid people, that we don’t hold grudges, that we don’t gossip, that we don’t tear people down behind their backs, but that we treat people as we ourselves would like to be treated.

It is so easy, though, to fall back to what we know, to fall back to the way we used to behave before we really knew Jesus. As I was preparing for this morning’s lesson, I ran across a story of a man visiting a zoo, and he was totally amazed, so he said to the zookeeper, “That is amazing, that you have a lion and a monkey in the same cage! How in the world do those two animals get along?” And the zookeeper said, “Usually, just fine. Occasionally, though, they have a disagreement, and then we have to get a new monkey!” I guess that is the way it is! Sometimes we don’t always get along as we should. And so we need this reminder – we are to love one another. Let us not be the lion in that picture. But again, 27 times in the New Testament, we are to **“love one another.”** And this love we share comes to us from God who is love.

**Conclusion:**

So, this morning, we have learned something from the apostle John!

- We've learned that God is love – and this love is not a feeling, but this love is a decision to do what needs to be done.
- We've been reminded that God's love is demonstrated for us in the cross, in the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins.
- And then we've learned that our response to God's love is to turn around and show that love to others.

I don't know what all of you are thinking about this, but I know that for me, this right here is enough to keep me pretty busy for a lifetime! In fact, if I could just make it through one day at a time remembering what love is, what God has done, and how I need to go out and do the same – if I could think about this every morning, I would have my challenge nailed down for the day. So, that is where we leave our text this morning. Next week, I'm hoping we can move forward with the next few verses (as well as several verses from Chapter 5), as we look at the ***"confidence"*** we have because of what God has done for us, the idea of not having any fear.

If there's something in your life we need to be praying about, something we've missed, something all of us need to know about, we would invite you to write that down if you can and bring it to the front in just a moment, and we would be honored to go to God in prayer for you. Or, speak with one of the shepherds of the congregation on your way out this morning, and we would be glad to pray with you in private as well.

Or maybe you'd like to know more about becoming a Christian. We know what God did for us. Jesus came and lived a perfect life, he died and was buried, and he came back on the third day. We respond to that good news obediently. With love and thankfulness in our hearts, we turn away from sin, we publicly proclaim to those around us that Jesus is the Son of God, and then we allow ourselves to be briefly but completely immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. If you have questions, let us know, or if you are ready right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)