

# Basics

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## **What Is Christian Love?**

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**1 John 4:7-11**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning. Today we are continuing on in our series Basics, which is putting us face to face with foundational concepts for us as we seek to live a life to the glory of God. For some new or newer in your Christian faith these are brand new concepts. For others, these messages have been reminders, and a check to see to what degree are we living out what we say we believe.

Last week we heard about the mission of the church to be disciples and make disciples. The week before we heard about what it means to be a joyful, passionate, God-glorifying worshiper. I can tell you that I am grateful for the Basics and the opportunity to hear God's Word again on these topics, for it's easy to forget what I know, and easy to not live out what I have been commanded.

This morning, our topic is Christian love. That's no small topic! How many songs have been written about love? How many books have been written about love? How many chapters in biblical commentaries are dedicated to Christian love? What does the Bible have to say about Christian love? Do we have another 45 weeks together to study this? Actually, we are going to take this **HUGE** topic and spend 45 minutes as we jump in this morning. Ready to go? Let's pray this prayer...Lord, by Your Word and Your Spirit, speak to me.

### **Psalty Slides: sing it with me...**

Turn in your Bibles to 1 John 4:7-11 and follow along as I read. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

<sup>7</sup> Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.<sup>8</sup> Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> *Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.* This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

### **Why** talk about Christian love?

This attribute of God is the best known, but *least understood*. The Bible says *God is love*. I think we could safely say the love of God is the most believed, the least understood and most distorted.

Our culture may believe God is love but at the same time disbelieves other truths about God that are equally as essential, such as His sovereignty, holiness and wrath of God. Isn't this what some think when they hear God is love?

- a. **God is nice.** A kind Grandfather who smiles a lot and never gets mad - like Mr. Rogers. After all, why wouldn't God love me, I am pretty likeable!
- b. **God makes me happy.** He is my friend. He is a grandfather who gives me candy whenever I ask him. He is Santa; I am worth it and He knows it.
- c. **God is not angry, He's tolerant.** In the Old Testament, God was too angry and not loving enough, but in the New Testament, God became a Christian and started acting nice. God wants me to enjoy life. God is chill; He overlooks sin. After all, we all go to heaven. In the end, love wins...

These ideas have floated around the water cooler, on TV talk shows and even in the pulpits of some preachers. Is this the God of the Bible? This may be the God of our own making, but it is not the God of the Bible who is from eternity and revealed Himself to this world in Jesus Christ.

Why are we talking about Christian love? This aspect of life is the most talked about, sung about, sought after, but least practiced. As one Christian songwriter put it, "*The Beatles said all you need is love, and then they broke up.*"

- d. **We have twisted love.** We have it backwards. We think love is about us. We are selfish. We live for our own comfort and pleasure. We use people and we love things. We lust and we lie. The consequence, says DA Carson, is that "sin corrodes all social relationships."
- e. **We love the wrong things.** The human heart is inclined to love that which will destroy it. My heart takes good things and turns them into ultimate things. I take the gifts of the Creator, ungratefully so, and love them more than I love Him. We make things and people and pleasurable experiences the centre of our lives, thinking that these will give us security and significance. We make idols of things, serving them instead of God.

We chase after idols and are led astray from Jesus Christ. We take the bait and open ourselves up to disaster. We are taken away from our **first love** for the pursuit of lesser loves. We think we are smart and can have a God **and** other loves. But we cannot serve two masters, for we will love one and be led away from the other. We saw that in our RMM readings in the life of Solomon. Our hearts become distorted because of disordered love. Whatever our wrong thing is, it will destroy us.

Is this how we are supposed to love? We have **distorted notions** of God and **distorted notions** of His love. This is what sin does to us. Sin disorders, distorts love. We dethrone God and we enthrone ourselves. We ignore His truth and we live by our lies. We don't love God as He deserves to be loved, with our entire being. That's why we need a Saviour.

Are you reading this morning in order to search the scriptures, to open up God's Word, and to dive into what it says about biblical love? Are you hungry to better understand His love, and find out how the Lord rescues us from the destruction of idolatry and selfishness?

As we look into God's Word, I want to answer 3 questions this morning: **why** do we love, **who** do we love and **how** do we love. First,

## 1. **Why** Do We Love? (vs. 7-10)

A. We love because of who **God is**. (vs. 7) - love is from God, (vs. 8) - God is love.

*<sup>7</sup> Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.<sup>8</sup> Anyone who does not love does not know God, **because God is love.***

God defines love. Love is fundamental to His very nature of God. Love emanates from His character.

*God's love means that He eternally gives of Himself to others. Wayne Grudem*

First, God's love is manifest in **His giving**. Even before creation, the love of God was fully active among the members of the **Trinity**. The love that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have for each other therefore make heaven a place of eternal joy and love, which we are invited into in Christ. What we see is God's nature in the Trinity reflected in God's relationship to humankind, as God reaches out to a rebellious humanity and invites them into this love. Jonathan Edwards, a New England pastor and theologian who lived in the early to mid 1700's wrote,

*There even in heaven dwells that God from whom every stream of holy love, yea, every drop that is or ever was proceeds ...there in heaven this fountain of love, this eternal three in one, is set open without any obstacle to hinder access to it.*

Second, God's fountain of love, as Edwards calls it, is displayed in His **providential care**. We have a world in which to live, where we are sheltered and can live and breathe, and our needs are met; God's daily mercies and common grace to this planet of rebellious people shows His loving mercy.

Third, God in His love calls this world into a relationship, in spite of our rebellion. God's heart yearns for the return of the prodigals. In loving kindness, God warns the perishing and calls sinful humanity to repent and come to know Him as Father and Saviour.

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16*

God eternally gives of Himself to others. It is part of His nature to bring good to those He has made. God loves the world. He loves His church, He loves His people. He loves His elect, forever faithful in His steadfast, covenant love to them. He says to His chosen ones, "In grace I chose to love you. You are mine. Nothing can separate you from my love through Jesus my Son."

b. Second, we love because of what **God has done**

God's love isn't just mere words He's splashed on a page: all talk and no action. He is not someone who promises to be there for us and fails miserably as a constant disappointment. He has acted in time and space; clearly it has been seen and understood. God has made this beautiful Creation, a world in which we live. How about the explosion of fall coloured, red, orange, and yellow leaves that we have experienced this week? But the love of God is infinitely more than His creation, and provision of our daily bread and His generous blessing of family and friendships. It was fully revealed to us in the person of His Son Jesus, in His death upon the cross.

*but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Rom 5:8*

The love of God was manifested, revealed fully at the cross where Jesus destroyed the work of the devil, and took our sins. God put His ultimate love on display for the world to see. God's love is cross-shaped. God gives, at a cost, a great cost, an inestimable, incalculable cost, to deal with our brokenness and give us life, eternally. This is the love of God on display. In our text John writes in vs. 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.*

Rightly we would describe God as loving and good, forgiving and merciful. This week in our RMM readings in the Psalms, we read about the compassion of God our Father. We are all over this. Good God. Patient, faithful God. But the Bible also says this loving God is a God of wrath.

He does not leave the guilty unpunished. God's wrath burns against guilty sinners. God is light and in Him there is no darkness. The Holy God hates everything that is opposed to His moral character. Therefore, God's righteous wrath is a function of God's holiness against sin. His wrath is directed against sin because He is a just God. This is not, as commonly misunderstood, simply an Old Testament doctrine. For example John 3:36 says,

*he who believes in the Son has eternal life he who does not obey the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God rest upon him. Romans 1:18*

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.*

How does God's wrath fit in with God's love? Would a holy God who did not deal with sin, or punish sin, be worthy of our worship as a just and holy God?

God's love and wrath are not in opposition to each other. His wrath coexists with His love. The most terrifying truth we could ever hear is that we are under the condemnation of our Creator - but the best news we could ever hear is that God has given His Son to die for sinners and made a way of salvation for the world. **This is the love of God for condemned sinners.** This is the gospel. Far from condoning sin, God's love confronted it, exposed it and dealt with it without destroying the sinner, but rather saving him. John MacArthur writes,

*That reality (of God's wrath) is the very thing that makes His love so amazing. Only those who see themselves as sinners in the hands of an angry God can fully appreciate the magnitude and wonder of His love. (Dwell....)*

How can God forgive sinners and still be consistent with His holy nature? The answer is the cross of Jesus. He is both the just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:26). ...

*Do you wish to see God's love? Look at the Cross. Do you wish to see God's wrath?*

*Look at the Cross. D.A. Carson*

Christ gave himself up, literally, up on a cross, up to God, lifted up for all to see that we might live through Him, that He might be the propitiation for our sins. We were dead, and are now alive in Him and alive for 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. 1 John 4:9-10*

In this verse we find the word **propitiation**. What does this mean? In our sinful state, we owed a debt we could not pay, so for us, Jesus Christ paid a debt He did not owe. **Propitiation** means an appeasement or satisfaction, specifically toward God, that has taken place. Propitiation is a two-part act that involves appeasing the wrath of God and being reconciled to Him.

*In the cross, Christ voluntarily took my place, bearing the guilt and punishment that my sins deserved, dying my death, so that the sin is cancelled, and the offense of our sin has so been removed that God no longer stands over against me in wrath but in favour. D.A. Carson*

It doesn't mean we have to do something to appease God and put away His anger, but something God did in His love made it possible for us to be forgiven. The gospel is what God in Christ has done for us. He has cancelled our sin, taking the punishment Himself, and gives us His righteousness. He has propitiated God His Father, and now the Father looks favourably upon us.

We did not earn the love of God. There was nothing of merit with in us that we should attract or deserve the love of God. God loves because of His perfections, not ours. The love of God is a sacrificial love – His seeking our good at a great cost. A greater self-giving than God's gift of his Son there has never been, nor could ever be.

Why do we love? Because of who God is. Because of what God has done. We've seen it and experienced it. It has been lavished on us.

*We love because he first loved us. (1 John 4:19)*

*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. (1 Jn 3:1)*

God's redeeming love is to be received and experienced. The Apostle Paul prays that the church might:

*have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge (Eph. 3:18-19)*

The hymn writer Charles Gabriel speaks of being overcome by this truth:

*He took my sins and my sorrows, He made them His very own;  
He bore the burden to Calv'ry, And suffered and died alone.  
How marvellous! How wonderful! And my song shall ever be:  
How marvellous! How wonderful! Is my Saviour's love for me!*

Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3 connects this Christian experience of the love of God with Christian maturity. God's love is transforming and it works a deep change in us that enables us to extend that love to others. That leads us to the third reason why we love.

c. Because of what God **commands us to do**

*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God (vs. 7)*

We can love because we know what love is. We can love because He first loved us. We can love because we've seen it and experienced it. Now, we are commanded to love. Jesus told His disciples,

*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. (John 13:34)*

Therefore, God commands us to love one another, as it is from Him. If we are united to God through faith in Christ then we share His nature. His Spirit is in us and His love is in us. Having saving faith, being made new, having a new heart and a new spirit, being born again, and being regenerated results in loving one another.

Put another way, loving our brothers and sisters is proof of fellowship with God. It is a valid test of our real and saving faith. Since God's nature is love, love will testify to the reality of our spiritual life. An absence of love shows the absence of saving faith and the living reality of a changed heart in Christ. (4:19-21). No love, no salvation.

*We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. (1 John 4:19-21)*

Loving one another is a demonstration of the veracity of our faith (1 Jn 2:6); we ought to walk as Jesus did. Love that has reached us and is transforming us, should reach out from us, and be transformative in the lives of others.

As we grow in our understanding of the cross, we will see the greatness of God's love in the personal realization of what it means to be an adopted, saved son or daughter of God. The greater your understanding of the cross, the greater your love will be for Christ and the greater your active concern and engagement with those He loves.

Why do we love? Because of who God is, what He's done, and what He commands.

## 2. **Who** Do We Love?

There is an order to our loves and the priority of our loves. If we get the order wrong, our disordered loves will result in a disordered life.

### a. **God**

Put God first. Love God most. Love the God who loved you. This is your life's mission. Live wholeheartedly in response to the God who gave it all for you.

The first commandment says,

*And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' Mark 12:30*

Love people second. Jesus said, the second is this:

*'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Mark 12:31*

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

Simply put, what is our response to this amazing grace and love of God? We are called to imitate this communicable attribute of God by loving God, and by loving others in the way that He loves us and them. Knowing that we have been loved unconditionally enables us to love in response.

God has said something to us and done something for us, and now with that knowledge we respond...

### b. **Family**

Love those closest to you – your family. It doesn't matter what you say, or what people think you do. Love has to be working at home. Love in the home is hard – that's where all our warts and wrinkles and selfishness is most evident. Husbands and wives, love each other.

*As is Christ to His body, the church, so I will be to you a loving and faithful husband. I love you and I know that this love is from God. I promise you my deepest love, my fullest devotion, my tenderest care. I promise I will live first unto God rather than others or even you.*

*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her  
Eph 5:25*

Parents, love your children, children love your parents. Let the love of Christ be evident in your family. His love binds us together.

c. **Family of God**

We are called to love the family of God, the brothers and sisters, the household of faith, the saints. Love this diverse group. Love this ‘not-a-lot-like-me’ group. Love this ‘we’re-learning-to-get-along-group.’ This is why you can meet a fellow believer and very quickly connect to them – you are family. They are your siblings in Jesus. You have a world of commonality amidst your own uniqueness. I arrived at the TGC conference on Thursday afternoon to meet 3 new band members for the first time, and by the time worship started, we were praying, playing, and affirming together.

*So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. Galatians 6:10*

*We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. 2 Thes. 1:3*

d. **Others**

God so loved **the world**... Who is the world? Us! Lost and scattered, trapped in bondage. We were blinded by sin, scattered and helpless.

*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” Matthew 9:36-38*

The crowds were poor, weak, confused and needy. They were neglected, forgotten, abused, and vulnerable. What do they need? They need the love of Jesus – the gospel. They need our presence, our help, our compassion and our forgiveness.

We’ve looked at why we love, and who we love; now let’s bring this down to street level:

### 3. How Do We Love?

#### God?

- Worship – personal & corporate
- Loving His Word – hunger for truth
- Obedience – if you love me...keep my commands
- Seek holiness / confess your sins
- Being a disciple – last week

#### Others?

*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Ephesians 5:1-2*

Loving others is not simply a responsibility, but a privilege; it is imitating Jesus, seeking to be like Him and loving those He loves. We love those He loves, with His love that He first gave to us.

Because God loves us, loved ones, let us love one another. We have been born of God and we know God, so we love in our words and in our deeds.

#### a. Word

- Speak truth, speak words of life, encouragement, affirmation, correction,
- Talk about hard things, God's standards, holiness, judgment, hell
- We love in our prayers
- Encouragement

The love of God compels us to share it with others (2 Cor. 5:14-15). We should not hesitate for an instant to declare the love of God for a lost world, for lost individuals.

Plead with the lost, share the gospel as God through you calls sinners to turn from their evil ways and live.

To love God is to obey God.

#### b. Deed – do good

The loved, love. The forgiven, forgive. The served, serve. As Piper says: Become what you are. Do what God is at work in you to do:

- Action (see a need, meet a need) – 3:17-18
- Serving others in their need (become aware of need / open eyes)
- Be open to God's nudges for you to act (call, card, conversation, concern)
- Blessing: be there - time, talent, treasure
- Awareness of our guests
- Visiting widows, caring for orphans, the shut ins
- Serving in a program or mentoring a new believer
- Providing childcare so parents can be in the worship service
- Forgiveness – we fall short
- Supporting one in crisis and sacrifice for someone in need
- Presence – just be there

### **Loving in community:**

- Patience and Kindness
- Getting rid of envy
- Having no place for boasting, not being arrogant, refusing to begrudge, not insisting on one's own way
- Guarding against irritability, not being resentful, not rejoicing at wrongdoings, rejoicing with the truth  
Bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things
- Not keeping a record of wrongs.

### **Conclusion**

Our love is a derivative of God's love. He is the well, we are the hoses. He is our source, we are His servants, and we love because God first loved us. The Spirit of God, who resides in us, brings His love to us and pours it through us. All our love is a reflection of His and our lived out response to it. If God so loved, and He did, then we also ought to love one another. As we love, that love is perfected in us.

And we know God...what He is like, and what He has done for us. This is more than just an intellectual understanding, it is an experience of His love. This is a growing relationship, from glory to glory, more all the time...we are becoming more like Jesus, and we are affected by our discipleship, both personally and in the context of community and living our faith out in the world.

What happens when we love? Our joy is made complete, the church is strengthened, the world comes to know Jesus and God is glorified. It is God's commandment – an old commandment, a new commandment (3:11) to love as God is Christ Jesus loved, so we ought to love. This is the Word of the Lord.