

Love's Source and Flow

1 John 4:7-12

Introduction

At the end of chapter 3 the apostle John taught us that Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross was the true measure of genuine love. Like Him, we ought to give up ourselves for the sake of others. That's what genuine love looks like. It's not just talk. It takes self-sacrificing action. *For a born-again Christian, loving others is a way of life.*

At the beginning of chapter 4, John turns our attention to the doctrinal truth that underlies this hallmark of Christian living. If Christ the Son of God never came in the flesh to die for us, then the supreme display of true love becomes historical fiction, thereby robbing believers of the model and power for their own expression of love toward others. Those who for any reason would deny God the Son's coming in the flesh, therefore, display the spirit of antichrist. They are anti-gospel. Having tested them, we are to reject such false teaching and the false living connected to it.

Now in 1 John 4:7-12 John returns to the theme of love as the practical test of whether someone actually belongs to God. He has taught us that through the coming of Jesus

Christ the light of love is already shining. He has argued that anyone truly born of God loves the brothers and sisters. Now he drives it further, declaring that love is the core of God's very nature. He is the Source. And those who display love toward others are displaying who God actually is.

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.

I don't know if you could use some form of the word *love* more times in such a short space than what John does here—15 times in 6 verses. John masterfully weaves together truth and action, doctrine and duty, reality and activity. His doing so counters the tactics of the gnostic heretics who love talking about knowledge and spiritual insight, but fail miserably both doctrinally in their view of Christ's person and work, and practically in

their neglect of self-sacrificing love. Their teaching is a mixture of pride, elitism, and lies. And their lifestyles were self-centered and harmful. Their lives were characterized by selfish pride, not self-less love.

John calls us to a life a love for three Divine reasons:

1. Love Personified: God's Character (7-8)
2. Love Displayed: God's Action (9-10)
3. Love Perfected: God's Purpose (11-12)

1. Love Personified: We should love one another because of God's intrinsic character (7-8).

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.

Beloved—ones God loves and John loves
Common NT designation of believers
They live in the sphere of mutual love—divine and human.

Love one another—reciprocal or mutual love
All the NT "one another" commands flesh out this hallmark of true disciples of Jesus.

- Serve one another in love.
- Be hospitable to one another.
- Minister your gifts to one another.
- Bear one another's burden's.

- Exhort one another.
- Build up one another.
- Receive one another.
- Confess your sins to one another.
- Forbear one another.
- Forgive one another.
- Express genuine love to one another.
- Treat one another as family and friends.

Love is from God—He’s the eternal Source.

Whoever loves has been born of God—regenerate; God’s life is in Him (via the Holy Spirit). We do what we are.

Whoever loves knows God (whoever does not love does not know God)—*Knowledge of God cannot and does not remain merely academic, philosophical, or theoretical. If we actually have an experiential knowledge of God, He marks how we live life. It is a life of loving others.*

Illus: friends take on similar ways of talking and doing

1 Corinthians 15:33

Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.”

God is love. Who He is. His quintessential character. When you walk with Him, you take on His character.

“For the loveless Christian to profess to know God and to have been born of God is like claiming to be intimate with a foreigner whose language we cannot speak, or to have been born of parents whom we do not in any way resemble.” John Stott, 161

To be loveless is to be ungodly.

1 John 1:5 God is light (revelation, truth).

1 John 4:8 God is love (self-sacrificing activity for the good of others).

1 John 2:9 Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.

Love is at the core of God’s character and identity. It is not the sum total of God (love is God), but God does everything consistent with love. And light. They are not opposed.

Love does not mean that God is agreeable to everything. That’s complacency. That’s moral laziness. That’s darkness, not light. That’s not love. Light and love go together.

Is your conception of God what He’s really like?—the God of love, Lover of your soul

What is your heart attitude toward other believers? Loving in your thoughts, words, deeds?

If you lack love, draw near to the God of love. He will increase your love for others.

Psalms—“His steadfast love endures forever.” Those who belong to Him reflect that same steadfast love—“loving loyalty based on a relationship that issues in kind deeds.”

2. Love Displayed: We should love one another because of God’s historical action (9-10).

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.

God’s loving character does not remain divorced from historical expression. The creation, the exodus, the promised land, the whole redemption story culminating in Christ. God’s love generated His sending His only Son—His *monegenes* (one of a kind) Son.

Sent His only Son into the world—
preexistence and deity of Christ
We become children of God, but we did not exist before we were born into this world. He did.

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 8:58 “Before Abraham was, I am.”

John 17:5 And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

We enter into fellowship with the triune God, but we are not members of the Trinity. He is. Jesus is God the Son in the absolute sense. As such He is the unique Son. Eternal. Sinless. Stronger than death.

However, God sent His one-of-a-kind Son so that we might live through Him.

1 John 5:11-12

¹¹ And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

¹² Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

2 Peter 1:4 Partakers of the divine nature

1 John 4:10

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.

This is love—not that we loved Him but that He loved us.

God's love is "free, uncaused, and spontaneous" (Stott, 162). We did nothing to merit His love. But we desperately needed it.

Sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

This explains how God could maintain perfect justice and yet give eternal life to those who

sin nature and sin deeds made them subject to death.

Propitiation—satisfaction of God’s righteous wrath on our sin

God loves us so much not that He is willing to condone our sin, but to die for our sin and to rescue us from it.

God’s historical action of love in sending Christ to pay for our sin and to give us life calls for us to love one another in practical/historical ways.

Your history is made up of time. How did you use your time last week? That is your history for last week. How will you use your time this coming week? That will be its history.

What if you were to use your time to show practical love every opportunity you have—husband, wife, children, parents, students, coworkers, church family?

3. Love Perfected: We should love one another because of God’s redemptive purpose (11-12).

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.

God’s sending His Son for us not only proves His love to us. It puts us under obligation. If

we have received God's love, we are under divine obligation to love one another. There is no other option.

This command is no surprise to us. It dates back to the Old Testament and is reiterated in the New. We feel the pressure of that command. We know we can always show love more than we do.

John has already introduced us to the concept that if God abides in us and we abide in Him, we will love one another. His life in us makes this inevitable.

What is nearly breathtaking, though, is that John takes this mandate for love further yet, teaching us that when we love one another, God's love is perfected in us. It is reaching its divinely intended goal.

John has used this language before:

1 John 2:5-6

⁵ but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: ⁶ whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

God's will, God's plan and purpose, is for His love in us to flow out through us to one another. This is not a contradiction to keeping His Word because the commandments are

summed up in two great commands: Love God supremely. Love your neighbor as yourself. *Only when we are loving one another does God's redemptive love reach its intended goal to make the invisible God visible to the world.*

This is precisely what Jesus did. He made the invisible God visible. He made Him known.

John 1:18

No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

Literally, He has exegeted Him.

To lead out, to explain—e.g., Biblical exegesis
When we teach the Scripture we are to explain, to make known, to draw out what is there, not to insert what is not (eisegesis).

As the second Person of the Trinity, Jesus made known the God who is there. He revealed the God no one has seen—He is Spirit (John 4:24), explaining Him in a way no one else could.

So John is using the same language here that he used of Jesus. Like Jesus, we are to make the invisible God visible. We do not and cannot do so to the degree Jesus did in His sinlessness. But Jesus Himself said that all people would know we are truly His

disciples—His learners and followers—if we love one another. He was on mission, and so should we be.

We often look at Jesus' statement just in terms of testing whether we belong to Him or not. But our text this morning indicates that loving one another also fulfills the purpose, the goal, the mission of God's love toward us.

We are made in the image of God. That image was marred by our sin. God the Father sent God the Son to satisfy the wrath of God on our sin so that we could be delivered from death and recover life. His life in us transforms us from the inside out, restoring His image in us and granting us the power to fulfill our created purpose. His love spawns life in us right down to the roots of who we are. And it produces the fruit of love in our lives.

The purpose of an apple tree is to produce apples. The Spirit in us produces spiritual fruit—Galatians 5—love heads the list.

God loved us the way He did and does so that we would shine out who He is through loving one another. How else is the world to believe that the Father expressed His love for us by sending His Son?

John 17:22-23

22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, **23** I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

Loving one another authenticates the gospel message. It makes God's love visible. It proves the gospel of Jesus actually works. So our loving one another is indispensable to our fulfilling the gospel mission given to us by Jesus. No wonder John is telling us that when we love one another God's love is perfected in us—it is reaching its goal so that we become effective ambassadors for Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:17-20

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. **18** All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; **19** that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Christ redeemed you to fulfill a God-sized purpose. It does not need to be spectacular. Such events usually tell us very little about a person. God's purpose for you should show up in the daily, practical life of love toward those around you. The more you live that way, the better others can see the invisible God through you.

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Show your family, your friends, your church, your community, your world who God is!

Conclusion

1. Love Personified: God's Character (7-8)
2. Love Displayed: God's Action (9-10)
3. Love Perfected: God's Purpose (11-12)

Closing Song: Here Is Love

Discussion Questions

1. What are some reasons doctrinal truth and practical love hang together in genuine Christianity, and why do fake versions of Christianity end up defective in both areas?

2. What are some reasons we sometimes question God's love?
3. In what ways does God's intrinsic character being love empower us to live the Christian life?
4. God showed His love historically by sending His Son to give us life and to be the propitiation for our sins. Why were these two areas so important for us?
5. What does God's showing His love with practical action in real history have to do whether our love for others is genuine?
6. According to this passage, how do we make the invisible God visible to others?
7. John uses similar language to verse 12 in John 1:18: "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." How is Jesus' God-given mission connected to our God-given mission?
8. Our loving one another fulfills the intended purpose of God's love toward us—"His love is perfected in us." What's so amazing about this truth? What's so inspiring about this truth?