

The Covenant Maker: The Father

Series – What Is the Gospel?

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This morning we're looking at what the Gospel is through the perspective of God as a covenant-making God. And we've looked at the series of covenants throughout Scripture as it leads us to the New Covenant, as it is expressed through the work and person of the Lord Jesus Christ. We now transition a little bit to look at the same question, and not just looking at the covenants, but rather at the Covenant Maker. And this month we're going to be looking at together the Trinity, the Covenant Maker who is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

We begin this morning with the Covenant Maker, the Father. It is appropriate for me to begin by looking at what is the confession of our church, that is, the church speaking to itself about what it believes concerning God, concerning who man is, concerning the Word of God. And we hear from the Westminster Confession of Faith as it speaks of who God is when it says the following:

He is alone the fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things; and has most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever he pleases. In his sight all things are open and manifest; his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to him contingent, or uncertain. He is most holy in all of his counsels, in all of his works, and in all of his commands. To him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience he is pleased to require of them.

And then it says these words:

In the unity of the Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost: the Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternal, begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost is eternal, proceeding from the Father and the Son.

This is an expression, a summary, of what the Scriptures teach of just how great is our God. And this morning we're going to look at who God is, expressly the Father. There are many places that I could turn to to consider this question or this perspective on what is the gospel through the lens of the Covenant Maker Father. But it is to this that the Lord directed my attention and my heart, and I pray he directs yours, because it is exactly on mornings like this that I get to declare the beauty, the glory of our heavenly Father

Hear now the Word of God.

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. [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.) Will you pray with me. Now, our Heavenly Father, through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who John proclaimed to be the word, coming from you, fully divine and fully made man—and not only by your Son, but by the work and power of your Holy Spirit that takes your word and enlivens it and applies it to our hearts, may you now help us to see you, God the Father, the Covenant Maker, who is love. Help the teacher. In Jesus' name. Amen.

You're going to see this morning as we're going to do two things through this passage from John, in this first epistle of his. What we're going to do first is we're going to look at the nature of what he says or what he means when he says that God is love. And in some sense, very quickly we're going to be looking historically and globally, and we're going to then come right back around to this specific passage. Because God intends for us to understand who he is and how he is to be known and then what should our response be. So you'll see the logic, then, with that context of the outline: **Love That Creates, Love That Redeems, Love That Radiates.** Love that creates, that redeems, that radiates.

First, **Love That Creates.** I begin here because it is very easy to consider who God the Father is—and when John says that he is love, it is easy to simply begin by looking at his redemption. But because God is so big and he is so glorious and full of all that can we can imagine and beyond our imagination, I want to say that if we begin by looking at who God is and who he is as love by beginning at redemption, we will have reduced God. Because God and his love is more than a love that redeems. It is a love that creates.

Consider for just a moment perhaps one of the more famous psalms, as the psalmist reflects on who God is: Psalm 19. This was used as a song for the worship of God's people. As David writes it, as he speaks of who God is, watch the logic of the psalm. I don't need to read all of it; I'll read a good portion of it. Psalm 19.

¹ The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

² Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they display knowledge.

³ There is no speech or language
where their voice is not heard.

⁴ Their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.
In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun,

⁵ which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.

⁶ It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is hidden from its heat. [NIV]

So how is it that we can look at creation and say that is an expression of the fact that God is love? It is right here. Do you hear it? He looks at all creation and he says it is an expression of God's glory. If John says that God is love, then everything about his character is shaped by that love. Therefore all of his creation—we can rightly assert and proclaim that his creation is an expression of his love. If that's not enough, listen to what the psalmist says when he describes the nature of this creation. He talks about it as speech that is greater than all the speech we've ever heard. It is of a greater language than any human being can imagine. It is like a voice that goes out.

And then he uses an anthropological way of looking at one part of his creation: the sun. And he likens it to what? Of all the things that he could take the sun and liken it to and compare it to some human attribute—there are so many things that he could say. It's like an eye. Or it's like a loud voice. But what does he say? “In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion.” What is he speaking of? He's talking about a wedding day when the groom is getting ready for his bride. It gives me goosebumps to say to you that in the morning when the sun rises, for God It is an expression of a wedding day love for you and for me and all of creation.

Do you know what it's like? Have you... When was the last time you went to a wedding? I was recently at the Colkitt-Espey wedding, and I remember seeing A.J. Colkitt when he saw that it was his day to get married to Emily Espey. And there was one of those moments—rarely do I get to see this—but they had a curtain. He didn't he didn't want to see her, but the joy was just leaping off of him. And a hand came from around the curtain. And he reached his hand, and they held hands together, and they prayed. That is an expression of the excitement that was in his heart and in his mind and in his body because of his love—so animated—for his bride. That is the sun. And when it comes forth onto the earth we feel its warmth. That is God's love, may I say, like a bridegroom coming forth, reaching out to touch his bride with his hand to say I love you. God's love creates.

More than that, we can say that God's love not only creates, it creates particularly through the one that he loves, the Lord Jesus. Do you know that his love creates, not because he first and foremost loved us, it is because he loves his Son. Consider the words of Paul when he writes in Colossians, when he says this of the Son regarding the Father and their relationship at creation. When these words. . .(let me turn there...Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians).

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. [Colossians 1:15-16, NIV]

God's love creates, and all that is is an expression of a God who is love. But he did it through his Son, who is the image of who God is, and God created through him—it tells us—and what? For him. All of creation is God saying I love you, my Son. We are the witnesses. We get to enjoy it. And as you come to know Christ, we become co-heirs with Christ. So everything that is for Christ also becomes ours, as those who inherit it, if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. My friends, what I want to remind you is that God's love is so big and God is so big, simply to talk

about him in terms of his redeeming love is to reduce him. But look and see that God's love is even more than redemptive love. It is a love that creates.

Consider the words—and I highly recommend to you this book by Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*—when he says this:

Grace, then, is not merely his kindness to those who have sinned; the very creation is a work of grace, flowing from God's love. Love is not a mere reaction with this God. In fact, it is not a reaction at all. God's love is creative. *Love comes first*. He gives life and being as a free gift, for his very life, being and goodness is yeasty, spreading out that there might be more that is truly good...His very nature is about going out and sharing of his own fullness, and so that is what he is all about. In contrast to all other gods, the exuberant nature of this God means that his pleasure “is rather a pleasure in diffusing and communicating to the creature, than in receiving from the creature.” [quoting Jonathan Edwards] Because it is the Father's love for the Son that is the motive behind creation, the Nicene Creed ascribes creation especially to the Father: “We believe in One God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.” Flowing from his love, it is his to command everything into being. Thus the cry comes from Revelation 4:11: “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”

God's creation is a reflection and an expression of his love.

But it is more. When we say that God is love, it is not only a love that creates it is a **Love That Redeems**. Knowing the covenant-making God, who is love, as the Father, is to know this God also and particularly as a savior God, the redeeming God. This knowledge of God is a love that redeems, and it is a redemptive love that is not abstract, it is not a philosophical point to be mused upon, nor is it a secret mystical exercise. Rather, what we have observed in this series in looking at what the Gospel is through the covenants, is that a knowledge of this God whose love redeems is to know it both historically and relationally.

We've been looking at it historically. As every point where God renews his covenant promises, his love towards a people—at every point that he announces it, he reminds them of what he has done historically. In Hosea 13:4-5, right in the midst as he's bringing truth to his people who have walked away from him, who have chosen other gods, he seeks to renew his covenant promises. Hear what he says.

But I am the LORD your God,
who brought you out of Egypt.
You shall acknowledge no God but me,
no Savior except me.
I cared for you in the desert,
in the land of burning heat. [NIV]

So what God seeks to do is, he doesn't say know my love as some sort of abstract philosophical experience, rather he always grounds his redeeming love in history. Do you remember what I did for you when you were enslaved in the land of Egypt? I brought you out, and I brought you

into a land. I am your God and you will be my people. This is what John refers to and what the other New Testament writers refer to when they refer to the Scriptures. They're not referring to the New Testament scriptures. They're referring to how God has expressed himself and revealed himself through the Old Testament Scriptures. And as we've looked at over the last several weeks we see that God is a covenant-making God, and at particular times in history he continues to make his love—and his redemptive love, particularly—known.

But not only do we know this redeeming love historically, we also know it relationally. And here we'll find both history and relationship bound together. If you look at 1 John, Chapter 4, notice what he says, verse 9.

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.

He does two things all together. He expresses this redeeming love historically. He's pointing – John is—to the work of Christ, first, in his incarnation. He was born, he was made manifest among us, he had a ministry among us, and he went to the cross. And I serve as a witness to his death on that cross. And it's all here when he says that he came to us as the propitiation for our sins. But there's also something profoundly and deeply relational about this language. It sounds rather abstract and doctrinal until we look at the word in depth. This word, which is translated for us as 'propitiation' in verse 10 of Chapter 4 of 1 John, is the same Greek word that can be translated as either expiation or propitiation. What John is talking about here are both, and let me explain what John means when he uses this word.

First, let's think about the word 'expiation,' that the work of Christ is an expiation on our behalf, i.e., the removal of guilt. That the work of Christ relationally, particularly, and personally upon you removes your guilt because of sin from you, and he takes it on himself in the cross. And because of that expiation, flowing from that is the work of propitiation, meaning this. That because Christ has removed our guilt from us and become a guilt offering for our sin, therefore God's wrath—propitiation—is removed from us and was placed onto Christ. Therefore what Christ has done has changed us, made us innocent though we were once guilty. And he's also gone about working with the Father not to somehow forget the wrath of God towards sin, but rather to take that wrath on himself, though it was due to us. There is something profoundly doctrinal, but there's also something profoundly relational. It means that God's love is more than we can ever imagine.

Were we to take this screen—we've used this idea before—were we to take all of these screens and all of our sins plastered on these screens for all of us to see—just our sins over the last 24 to 48 hours—what would it show? Every thought, every motivation, every word, every act, every inaction. What would it show? Lord, have mercy upon us. And yet the Lord who knows all things, who is eternal from beginning to end, who is the Alpha and the Omega, knows each and every one of our sins. And in Christ he has removed your guilt. But more, he took it on himself. But more, on the cross was poured out all of God's wrath due to sin. This is redemptive love.

Christopher Wright—wonderful, wonderful theologian and writer—in another book I highly

commend to you, *Knowing God the Father through the Old Testament*, says it this way.

It is not through a process of speculation about what God may or may not be like. Nor is it a matter of merely checking off a doctrinal checklist about God's attributes. God the Son was not content either merely to discuss with his Father all the possible strategies for removing sin in dealing with the human condition, or to send to earth a cosmic sympathy card telling us, "I share your pain." Rather, he came and he died to save us. Knowing this God, knowing this Father, means knowing what God has done, knowing it was done for you and for me, and knowing, then, what the response should be.

Again, knowing God the Father, who is love, is knowing what God has done, knowing it was done for you and for me, and then knowing what the response should be as a result. This is precisely and clearly what John is referencing when he's talking about who God is, when he says he is love. From the beginning of this passage to its end, John states clearly when he says these words, and it is our response to God's redeeming love:

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.

There is both the reason and the response. God's love is the reason. Our response is to allow God's love to **radiate** in us and through us. As great as the sun is in all of its glory, the sun can save no one. Only the Lord Jesus Christ can save. And isn't it all cosmic mystery why God, then, would do it the way that he did, to send forth his Son to take on our guilt, to take our sin though he was innocent, that we might receive forgiveness and not wrath, to be redeemed, and then to say it will be through you that the world will know that I have sent my Son. It will be through your love that this work of the cross will be made known. How remarkable how immense. How crazy is that?

How are you doing in loving one another? Isn't it hard? I mean, not loving each other when you get love back, but loving when you get the cold shoulder. Not that cold shoulder, the really cold shoulder. When you get iced out or yelled at. When you get dismissed or you were just made to feel rejected. When you were hated, when you're ostracized, when you're called names, when you are ignored. Whatever the case may be, the truth comes to us so piercingly and so beautifully. He simply says:

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.

That means, when we love one another, small and large, we can say that the hands and feet of Christ is walking in our midst. We can say that God abides. We can say God is present. When people are redeemed they become the greatest sermon that can be preached, because the love of Christ has so transformed them that they, then, become the reflection of that love. It is immense. It is a mystery. But it is also meant to be a delight. Because even in the moment when we find it most difficult to forgive and to love one another—that is precisely the moment when we begin to reflect on what Christ has done for us in his creating and redeeming and radiating

love. And there we find the fuel. Friends, the only way you and I love one another in the hard places, the only way, is to go back to the only fuel and the only source for that love, and it was with Christ who walked among us, who took our guilt and took our sin. And God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son. This is God the Father who is love.

Two things I have. First, not everyone here believes the Lord Jesus Christ. And perhaps you've rejected most of what I've said, but the invitation to you is still the same. Do you know this Father's love? This Father's love is ever present. It never fails. And it knows you to the bottom and he loves you still. I invite you to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ this day and the love of the Father through him for you.

Secondly, if you are a Christian and profess faith in Jesus Christ with me, there is no greater intersection than between Christ's love and our love for one another. And so I pray for you this morning, as I pray for myself, may this intersection between Christ's love and our love for one another, may that be the place where we drink most deeply of what Christ has done for us, so that we might poured out on to others. Not to us, not to us, oh Lord, be the glory, but to you and to you alone. For you, our God, are love.

Let's pray. May you, Lord, work in us this love, this love that creates, this love that redeems, and this love that radiates. May you make us the body of Christ here at Columbia Presbyterian Church and all who call upon the name of Jesus Christ by faith in and around the world, we pray. May this love radiate to the glory of the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.