

Loving One Another for God's Sake

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We read the word of God together tonight in 1 John 4. This is God's word.

1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. 2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: 3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. 4 Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. 5 They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. 6 We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error. 7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. 8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. 9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. 10 Herein is love, not that we 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 ought also to love one another. 12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. 13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. 15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. 16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. 17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. 19 We love him, because he first loved us. 20 If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? 21 And this

commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

We read God's word that far. The text for the sermon is verse 11,

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." John writes that in chapter 3, verse 1. Beautiful, marvelous, well-known words, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God." We are called the children of God. What manner of love is that? The children of God, and how do these children of God manifest themselves in the world? The Apostle John is very interested and eager by the Holy Spirit's inspiration to teach the readers of this epistle, to teach us tonight, how the children of God are manifested in the world. In chapter 3, verse 10, he says, "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." He that loveth not his brother is not of God. He is not manifesting himself that he is one of the children of God. "For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." Verse 23, John goes on, "And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment."

He goes on in chapter 4 in verse 7 to take up that theme again and he says it again, "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God." That fact that he loves his brother is the evidence that he is born of God and he knows God. But the person in the church who professes the name of Christ but does not love his brother, does not know God, verse 8, he says, "for God is love." If you do not love your brother, if you do not show love for your brother or your sister in the church, then you don't know God yet. God is love and God has manifested his love toward us in Christ. So he says if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

He goes on to say that no one has ever seen God. You have not seen God. I have not seen God. John had not seen God. No one has ever seen God. But he says if we love one another, verse 12, God dwells in us and his love is perfected in us. His love has hit its mark in us. If we love one another, that's the proof, the fruit, the evidence that God's love has hit its mark in us, but if a man goes around in the church and says, "I love God. I love God. I love God." But he hates his brother, John says he's a liar. He does not tell the truth. He speaks a lie. Or a man who loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? He can't. You love God whom you have not seen by loving the man that you can see, the one right in front of you. This is the commandment that we have from him, that he who loveth God loves his brother also.

So that's the context and the flow of thought of the text that we consider tonight in verse 11, and what a relevant scripture it is. Relevant to us. It's relevant to us always. The preaching of God's love is always relevant to us. Imagine in our marriages how often we need to hear of God's love for us and our calling to love each other as husband and wife.

We need to hear that every day. It's always relevant. In our families as fathers and mothers with our children, how often do we need to hear of God's love for us and our calling to love each other in the home? Always. Every day. And in the church, how often is it relevant for us to hear of God's love for us and our calling to love one another in the church? It's always relevant. Always.

Always relevant but sometimes very urgent and surely we all would say that at this time as a congregation and as a denomination in all that we have gone through in this past year and continue to go through in this present, how relevant and how urgent to hear the preaching of this word of God, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought to love one another." So I call your attention to that text under the theme "Loving One Another for God's Sake." First of all, God's great love for us and, secondly, our debt to love one another.

In the text, the Apostle John writes, "Beloved." Beloved. This morning, I preached in Georgetown from Philippians 2 and in that passage Paul calls them, "My beloved," Philippians 2. But here John calls the saints, "Beloved," and he's not there talking about his love for them but he's talking about God's love for them. "Beloved." He's addressing them as those whom God loved and whom God loves. And to whom is he writing this epistle? He's writing it to Christians, to believers who confess the name of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, at that time in the early church, but the same word comes to us who confess the name of Christ here at Grace Protestant Reformed Church on this day of our Lord, October 31, 2021.

Now I would like to focus our attention in the first point on that little phrase at the beginning of the text, "if God so loved us," and I believe that in this text and in this passage in the flow of thought here, John is intending and the Holy Spirit is intending to impress upon us the truth that God loved us and that he loves us. So to impress that upon us, let's draw out four words in that phrase, "if God so loved us," beginning with the last word.

"If God so loved us." God so loved us. He loved us. Not just the saints living there in that time, in that place, who confessed Christ, but all of the saints throughout all of the ages who are believers in Jesus Christ, chosen from eternity, given to Christ, redeemed by Christ, God loves us. But what makes this so astounding is that we know who we are. Who are we whom God loved? Are we better than other men? Are we different from other men whom God does not love? We know that God does not love all men, especially we who hold to the Reformed faith, we know that God loved Jacob and he hated Esau, and that there are those whom God loves and those whom he hates. He doesn't love everybody. But the scripture comes and says to believers, "God loves you." But who are we? Are we different from unbelievers? Are we better from those who do not know Christ, who do not confess Christ? Are we more attractive to God than them? Are we more lovely? Are we more lovable? Is there something about us, something that we have done, something that we have said that we have made ourselves somehow different so that God cast his eye upon us and he was drawn to us and he admired us, and he adored us, and he loved us? And we all answer, "No! No, I'm not any different from that man

down the street, that woman across the road who never goes to church, who actively denies Christ and who says there is no God. Or that person who is living in open adultery and fornication or any other kind of sin. I'm not better than them. I'm not different from them. I have not done anything to draw God's affection to me. God says that I have to love him with all my heart and soul and mind and strength, but I know myself and I know that I am prone by nature to hate him, and prone by nature to hate my neighbor. I know how selfish I am. I know how bitter I can be. I know how resentful I can be. I know how proud I can be. I know the lusts of my mind and my flesh. I know the things that I have done. I know that I am no better than any other man. I know that there's nothing that I've done, nothing to attract God's attention to me and yet God loved me."

And the apostle says, "God loved us." Us. Us who are by nature totally depraved and miserable sinners. And even though now we are born of God, as he says, born of God yet still we carry with us our old man of sin and every single day we fall back into sin, we fall short of the glory of God, and every sin that we commit is like an awful stinking stench that makes us disgusting and revolting in the eyes of God and in the nostrils of God, so that when he smells what we do and when he smells what we think and what we say, it's a disgusting odor to him. All sin is, including my sin.

I am a sinner and God says, "I love you," and so in the second place, we focus our attention on that word "love." If God so loved us. What is that, what is love? What does it mean that God loved us? It means, beloved, that God has a certain attitude about us, a certain determination with regard to us, and that determination of God, and notice, a determination not just a feeling or a passion, although it is surely a passionate determination on God's part but it's not just that as we think of human love or feelings and emotions which we know go up and down and here and there and all over the place, but God's love is a settled and absolute and everlasting and unchanging and passionate determination and that determination of God is to look upon us as precious, to look upon us as beautiful, to look upon us and to see people who are desirable even though we are not desirable by nature. But to look upon us as desirable, to look upon us as people whom he desires, and moreover it is his determination to do good to us, to do the greatest possible good to us.

If you walk down the street and you see a man in need, a stranger, a bum on the street perhaps, and he's begging and you show love to him and that love is that you do good to him, you give something to him, or to your brother or sister in the church who has needs and you fill those needs, you do good to that person. But especially I'm thinking of a stranger now and you do good to that person yet is that the highest kind of love? Do you desire to enter into a relationship with that person? Do you desire to take that person into your home? Do you desire to adopt that person as your son or your daughter and to live and to have a relationship, close intimate communion with that person for the rest of your life? That's God's love.

For us who are married, when we got married, we took vows in the church to our spouse, and we husbands took a vow before the assembly and before God and before the minister and we promised to love our wife until death do us part. We promised to love her, to do

good to her, to desire her, to seek her, to pursue her, to protect her, to provide for her, and never to forsake her, never to leave her until death do us part. We were entering into a relationship of deep, intimate, warm, close communion of love. That's the greatest and highest kind of love. That's God's love for us.

And we try to teach our children, don't we, how significant marriage is, that you take a promise, a vow to love each other until death do us part. For the rest of your life you will dwell with this person in the same home, in the same family, under the same roof, and you vow to love her and to love him, and to be faithful. It's a commitment, it's a determination and we think that a lifetime is a long time, don't we? But when the scripture says that God loved us, the meaning is that God is determined, passionately determined in the infinite depths of his divine nature to do to us the greatest possible good, to draw us to himself, to draw us into a relationship with him, the deepest, sweetest, most intimate possible relationship of his covenant and to be our God and to take us as his people for all eternity.

Think of that love. When God says, "I love you," that is no small thing. When God says in the text and in the sermon tonight, "I love you," God means by that, "I want to dwell with you forever, for all eternity. I want to dwell with you and I want you to dwell with me. I want to be with you and I want you to be with me. I want to walk with you and talk with you and be with you. I want to have a relationship with you. I want to know you and I want you to know me, and I want that to grow greater and greater and deeper and deeper and warmer and warmer." In the age of unending ages, there's no turning back for God, not even death ends his love.

God loved us. God loves you. God is perfect in his love. Unlike us whose love is often conditional, often we husbands or wives love our spouse only when they love us or because they love us. Or we love our friends because of something they do for us. But God loves us unconditionally. God doesn't love us because we first loved him. God doesn't love us because we now love him. God doesn't to make his love depend upon our loving him. He loves us always, unchangingly, absolutely, eternally.

God does not view us as an object or an instrument merely by which he can achieve pleasure for himself. Here in our human world, that's lust when we look at another person simply as an object by whom and through whom we can satisfy our own desires and get pleasure for ourselves one way or the other. So we use people and we call it love. That's not God's love. Although it is true that God has determined all of us to serve the ultimate goal of his glory, yes, he has made all things for his pleasure and according to his pleasure and for his great glory. Although that is true, here's the great mystery, here's the great difference: God never uses us merely for that and he never discards us when we don't give him that. When we don't give him the glory that is due unto him, when we don't worship him as we ought to do, he continues to love us unconditionally to all eternity, world without end.

That's a great mystery and God is glorified in us and through us, we're the objects of his love. He is glorified precisely in the manifestation of his love as an unending, eternal,

absolute, unconditional love. God is not some great selfish being. God is love and God loved us. God loves you. How much, how much does he love us? How much did he love us? The third word we examine is the word "so, if God so loved us," and by that little word the apostle is connecting this text to the preceding context, and in the context he has just told us that God is love and God manifested his love toward us in this, that he sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. Here in his love not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, how much did God love us? He loved us so much that he sent his Son into the world for us.

God has a Son. God is not a lonely God but God is a Father and a Son and a Spirit, and God as a Father has a Son, he only has one Son, one eternal and natural Son, one who is in the highest and most unique sense of the word his Son because he is God of God, light of light, eternally begotten of the Father. God only has one begotten Son and he loves his Son very much.

The love of the Father for the Son is his everlasting, absolute and unchanging determination to view him as precious, to hold him as precious, to commune with him in the deepest, indeed, infinite communion of the Trinity. And God could have manifested his love toward people outside of himself whom he would create, to us human beings, he could have done that in a perfect world without sin as he did love Adam and Eve in the beginning. He loved them. In their perfect state in the garden of Eden without any sin, God loved them and they experienced his love and they knew his love. He manifested it. They saw it. They rejoiced in it. They praised him for it. God was glorified in the manifestation of his love in the garden of Eden but that was not God's highest purpose. God's highest purpose was to manifest his love as a greater thing. Greater. God aimed higher.

God wanted to manifest his love in the highest possible way as a love for sinners, and a love that would be so great that he would send his Son, his most precious one to become one of us. Not just to teach and preach and heal and cast out demons, but he sent him, his precious Son, to become one of us and to be the propitiation for our sins, to die for our sins, to give himself as the sacrifice for our sins. To stand in your place, sinner, in your place, sinner, and in my place, sinner, stand in our place and to suffer in our place and to shed his blood in our place, and to suffer the agony of the wrath and the judgment and the fiery indignation of God that I deserve for my sins in my place on the cross. To be a propitiation. To die for me. To die for me. To give himself for me. For me. Me.

That's how great God's love is. His precious Son. How much do you love your children? How much do you love them? And you're just a human. Your love isn't perfect but you love them, don't you? You love your children. You are committed to them. You are committed to viewing them as precious. They're dear to you. They're precious to you. And everything you do, you do for them. You go to work for them. You pray for them. You do devotions with them. You teach them. You feed them. You set an example for them in the home. And if they're in danger, you would run to their rescue. You would lay down your life for them because you love your children so much. They're so precious to

you and God has a Son who is so precious to him, the most precious thing, but God said in the depths of eternity, "I am going to reveal how great my love is, I'm going to send my Son. I'm going to give my Son so that they might live and not die." God arranged everything so that we would find ourselves in this sorry predicament of being lost, wretched sinners, and then he would send his Son and lead him to the cross, and give his Son on the cross and say, "Do you want to know how much I love you? That's how much I love you, look at the cross. That's how much I love you. I gave my Son so that you might live and not die." Truly God loves us. Truly he wants us. Truly he desires to be our God, for us to be his people for all eternity, to give his Son.

And fourthly, we take note that God is the one who loved us. We're not talking here about the love of a man or a father or a husband as wonderful and sweet and blessed as the love of your spouse might be for you, and the love of your parents might be for you, and as committed as they might be to you, and as devoted as they might be to you. We're not talking about that, we're talking about the love of God. The love of the Almighty. The love of the infinite one who fills the universe. The love of that being who created this world and called into existence out of nothing everything that is. The one who by his awesome power from moment to moment to moment upholds, preserves, governs, regulates, directs everything that happens everywhere in the universe. Everything everywhere. This great God, this glorious, majestic, holy, righteous king of the universe, he loves you and me. He doesn't try to love you. He doesn't do his best to save you. He doesn't just offer things to you. He doesn't make it depend upon you. He loves you and gives you eternal life.

Do you understand that? The apostles were so gripped by this, John, Peter, Paul, they were so gripped by it and they wanted other Christians to be gripped by it, they wanted them to understand it a little bit and to grow in that understanding. So for example in Ephesians 3, Paul says, "I'm praying for you. I'm praying that you will be able to comprehend what is the length and the breadth and the height and the depth, and to know the love of Christ for you. I'm praying for you that you will know that in your heart." You are loved by Christ, do you know that?

If you know that, then you also know that we ought to love one another. If you don't know that, then you don't understand what it means and why I must love my brothers and sisters in the church. You don't get it. You're still blind. If God so loved us, everything depends upon that. If I grasp that, that's the whole point of the text. If you get that, then you also get this: we ought to love one another. It just follows, it just flows right out of that. If you don't yet grasp that God loves you in Christ and you don't have a true faith in your heart believing that, then you might go around in the church saying, "I love God. I love God. I love God. I love the truth. I love the truth of God and I love God." But you're a liar. If you hate your brother, you do not manifest that you know the love of God for God is love and those who love know God and God dwells in them.

Do you know God's love for you? Then you understand the debt that you have, the eternal debt. It's not the kind of debt that we will ever pay off. It's a debt of gratitude that we owe and we can never pay it off. We ought also to love one another, he says, we

ought to love one another. Why ought we to love one another? We've just seen that in the first point but we still will ask, "Why? Why?" Let's explore that just a little bit further. Why must we love one another? Is it perhaps because God commands us to? It surely does. One of those golden threads which we call the rule of faith, those golden threads that run through the whole scripture is the truth and the command of God that we love our neighbor as ourselves. The first commandment that we love God with all of our heart and soul and mind and strength, and the second that we love our neighbor as ourselves, that's the law. The law comes to all men and if they don't read it in the scriptures, they have its work, its requirements written on their hearts and they know it. They know as they look at other men, they know in their hearts, "I have to love him." They don't do it necessarily but they know that they have to do it. They know it's required. They know that God comes to them and says to them, "Love your neighbor as yourself." But that law comes to all. The calling of our text does not come to all, it comes to us, it comes to the church, it comes to believers and those who confess the name of Christ because God does not love all men but he loved us and he says if God loved us, we ought to love each other. That's a call that comes to believers, to the church.

The word "ought" in the text means literally "we owe it." It's a debt. It's a debt that we owe. It's not just a generic English word "ought," but in the Greek it carries the idea of "we owe a debt." That's the root meaning of that word. We owe a debt to love each other because God loved us.

So we can see, then, we don't owe the debt to our brothers or sisters in the church, we don't owe it to them. Sometimes we feel that way. We feel that we owe a debt to our brothers and sisters in the church. We feel indebted to them because they loved us so we feel indebted to love them. When they show kindness to us, when they write cards to us, when they visit us in our need, when they're there for us, when they bring over a hot meal after we just had a baby, or whatever they do, all the acts of kindness that they do for us, and we feel something inside us, we feel this debt, this need to love them back, to sort of pay them back with acts of kindness as well, at the very least to express our appreciation and our thankfulness to them for what they did. We feel that and that's good, but we are to understand we don't owe a debt to them, we don't owe a debt to love them, we aren't called to love them because they loved us, not ultimately. And I say that, that's very very important because if we think that our love for them depends upon their love for us, don't you see what's going on there, the conditionality of that love? And don't you see then, too, that that same person who was so kind to you before, you was your friend, your close friend, and you had intimate fellowship with each other in your homes together and you shared a life together, he turns against you and lifts up his heel and crushes you under his foot and betrays you as people did to King David which he writes about in the Psalms. What happens when a brother or sister turns against you? Does that then mean that I don't have to love them anymore because they're not loving me anymore and therefore there's no debt to love them anymore? No, because we don't owe the debt to them, we owe the debt to God.

God has showered upon us his love. He calls us to pay our debt of gratitude by loving him and by loving him, in part, by loving each other. If God so loved me, then I ought

always to love my brother or sister in the church no matter what they do to me. That never goes away. I ought to love my wife not because of all the good things she does for me, although you'd better return thankfulness to her for those things, but ultimately not because of that. I have to love my wife ultimately always and that never changes because this never changes, God always loves me and that is where I find the strength to love the hardest people to love. We find the strength to love the people who frustrate us, irritate us and annoy us, the people who get on our nerves or worse, the people who actively oppose us and set themselves up as our enemies and who say that they hate us, and who condemn us, people still within the walls, so to speak, of Christendom, professing Christians, people who at one time were our close familiar friends, brothers and sisters with whom we had intimate fellowship who turn against us and condemn us and accuse us and say the most hurtful and painful things even explicitly expressing their hatred. What is our natural inclination? To return evil for evil.

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "If you love those who love you, what reward have you?" If you only love the people who are nice to you, if you only love the people who speak well of you, if you only love the people who are currently your friends, then what difference is there between you and the wicked publican? Jesus says there is none. "But I say unto you, love your enemies." Don't hate your enemies, love your enemies. If anyone says that we should hate those who turn against us, those who accuse us, those who betray us and condemn us such as several hundred former Protestant Reformed people, at least their leaders, if anyone says that we should hate them, where is that in the Bible? "Do I not hate them, O Lord, that hate thee?" Psalm 139. True, that's in the Bible. Can we say with absolute certainty that those who have gone out are those who hate the Lord, that they are reprobates? Can we say that? Do we know that? Of course not. If anyone says that we are to hate them, it's a lie. You will show that you are the children of God when you do the hard thing of loving those who abuse you and misuse you and condemn you and accuse you, can spew forth hatred towards you. When you love them, then you manifest that you really understand the first part of the text.

How in the world can we love such? We can't. But when God makes known to us through the preaching of his word how much he loves us, then it's as if in that moment when we lay hold by faith upon that, at least in that moment, it so quickly slips away, but at least in that moment when we lay hold upon that, "He loves me, I'm his son, he longs to dwell with me for all eternity." Then when I see the person in front of me with their scowl, with their wrath, with their rage, with their accusations, the hatred that would naturally rise up in me melts away. I pray that you've experienced that and growth in the Christian life means that we grow in that experience, that we learn day by day to lay hold upon this not just intellectually but in the heart, in my heart to lay hold upon it today. Today. God loves me. Now I set forth my foot. Now I deal with people. It changes everything.

So in the coming week, I encourage you to meditate upon this, as I said, relevant always, urgent sometimes, very urgent sometimes like now, I believe. So I encourage you to meditate upon this in your life and to ask yourself the question, "Who is that person in my life that I've not been loving?" And then to ask yourself, then to remind yourself rather of what we have just heard, of how much God loves me, he's going to take me with

him in eternity. And then think about that person again, reflecting on what the scriptures say, 1 Corinthians 13, 1 John, the whole epistle, what does the Bible actually say, reflecting on that and applying it to your life. Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels and have not love, though I know and understand all mysteries, all doctrine, though I can recite from memory all of the answers in the "Essentials of Reformed Doctrine" book, wonderful as that is, very wonderful, that's all I have and I don't have love, I'm nothing. That's Paul, the great theologian, the great lover of sound doctrine, the great defender of sound doctrine and preacher of sound doctrine said that. "I'm nothing."

If God so loved us, and he did, we ought to love one another. Amen.

Father in heaven, we humble ourselves. We are truly amazed, we know ourselves, we know we aren't lovable, and so we are amazed that thou hast loved us so much and that thou dost not keep that a secret but thou dost make it known to us. Father, we have fallen short each of us in our personal relationships, in our words, in our thoughts, not one of us can say that in this past year or even in this past week or even today that we have been free from thoughts of anger and bitterness and wrath and even hatred. Forgive us. Blot out our sins. And we thank thee for a fresh opportunity in the coming week and we pray that thou would impress upon us the gospel of thy love in Christ Jesus displayed at the cross and may that be the power and strength in our hearts and lives to grow in love for one another. In Jesus' name. Amen.