

4-God is Love  
*Attributes of God*  
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**Bible Text:** 1 John 1:8b, 16b  
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Our Scripture readings this evening is from 1 John 4. Let's hear the word of God.

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.

May God bless his practical word.

Dear church family, God has been very good to us. He's brought us this far to enter the 2020s, to come again to his house. He's been faithful and kind beyond all expectation. Though we have often forsaken him, he has not forsaken us. He will lead us along, we trust, in his Son also in this decade, and that also from Lord's Day to Lord's Day as we heard this morning, through a Son, a glorious Son who suffered and died for us and bore the curse for sinners like us, to be our God, our Father, our friend, our greatest treasure, and hopefully not just to the end of this year but throughout the decade. Some of us, no doubt, fear we won't see the 2030s, we're getting old, but it's okay. It's okay if you're ready to meet the Lord if he takes you home because then you will have that friendship with him perfected, and you'll be sin free in Immanuel's land. So whatever he does with us in the 2020s, if we are blessed with his presence, we need fear no evil. If we are favored with his smile, we need dread no foe. If we are upheld by his power, we need shrink from no trial. If we are strengthened by his grace, we don't need to panic at any suffering. But if we are taken up into his love, we can say we love him because he first loved us, and what a love that is, a love that made us, a love that remade us, a love that keeps us despite all the snares we have fallen into, become entangled in, all the slips and sins we have done, all the shame and sorrow that we procure to ourselves, his love abides forever.

So as we heard this morning, if thy presence go not up with us, carry us not up hence. So we may say tonight, if thy love go not up with us, carry us not up hence. But praise be to God, his love is at the vanguard of his attributes, those attributes that we've been looking at recently. We've looked at in three sermons now his mercy, his holiness, his immutability, and it's fitting that on this first Lord's Day of a new decade, we look at the amazing love of God that passes all understanding in its height, and its depth, and its breadth, the Apostle Paul says, who can comprehend the love of God. But by this love we live and by this love we die, and of this love the Apostle Paul said, "I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

So our text words tonight are from 1 John 4, you can find them in verse 8, you can find them again in verse 16, just three words, "God is love." God is love. So that's the title of our sermon tonight and with God's help I want to look at three things with you: what this does not mean, God is love; second, what it does mean; and thirdly, if these things are true and the first things are not true, how should we then live? How should we then live? So under each point I want to give you three things tonight, three things that God is love does not mean, three things that it does mean, and then three ways to live.

So number 1: God is love does not mean that love is God. God is love does not mean that love is God. God is love and love is God are not simply reversible or identical. In logic

and grammar, there are ways of saying something that's the same back and forth. You could say a sphere is a round object, or a round object is a sphere, and some people like to do that with God. They say, "Well, God is love, that means wherever there is love, there is God." That's the way sometimes people who live common law together, live unbiblically, or homosexuality will say, "But there is love here so love is God and it must be right because I feel love." But you see, too often even some Christian people think of love as just a mere warm feeling that oozes with some kind of sentimentality. It's possible to feel certain love for something that is not ordained by God; by nature we love sin and that is not of God.

So you can't say love is God, there are lots of things loved that are not God. You see, true love affects the heart, the mind, the soul, our whole being, and when we truly love God, then our whole being wants to honor him in every area of our lives. So that's the first mistake that people make when they say, "God is love," sometimes what they really mean is love is God but they're wrong. The second mistake that some people make is God is only love. They say, "Well, if God is love and the Bible defines him like this twice in one chapter, then that's all God is." That's absurd. The Bible says so many other things about God. We find, of course, this idea particularly in liberal theology and it usually eliminates God's holiness and God's wrath and God's justice and other attributes that we might find a bit uncomfortable. It just does it all away and it says, "You know, there's no hell because God is love. There's no wrath of God because God is love." But that's to pick one part of the Bible and say that's true, and to pick another part of the Bible and say that's false. You've heard people say things like, I've talked to people on planes who said this common thing I hear, they say, "You know, God is love so God won't send anyone to hell," but they don't have a complete picture of what this means, that God is love, or of the other attributes of God. They say, "Well, God loves everyone unconditionally," but where do you find that in the Bible? You don't.

So no Christian, no true Christian would say God is only love and therefore God is none of these other things, but some Christians do say God is primarily love and they fall into the trap of separating the attributes of God in our own minds and saying, "Well, God is primarily love and he's secondarily this, and he's tertiary this," and they program the attributes into an ascending, descending order, if not explicitly then implicitly, and they say, "God is primarily love. He's more love than he is all his other attributes even though they're still there as well." This is a kind of unbiblical immature theology that doesn't understand what the Bible says, that God is one in himself and he just through his revelation he shows us his love, his justice, his wrath, etc. but in God all his attributes are one.

So if you just say God is primarily love and you minimize his holiness, you'll end up living a lifestyle of license and liberality and you'll end up probably being a god to yourself and just doing what you want according to your own eyes. If you move to the opposite extreme and say God is primarily holiness and, well, maybe a little bit of love, primarily justice and a little bit of love, you see, then you end up usually with some kind of legalism that you out of a slavish fear try to please God. So it's very important in our lives to get a biblical grasp of the biblical God and to see God in all his balance and all

his beauty and all his glory, all his attributes in him as one so that we understand that God is infinite in all that he is, infinite in love, infinite in holiness. And we can't just say one infinity is greater than another infinity. God is all infinite love. God is all infinite holiness. God is all infinite power. God is all infinite wisdom. So it's sloppy, poor, immature theology that leads to lifestyle problems when you say, "Well, God is primarily love," and everything else you can kind of say, "Well, that's not really that important about God."

The third error which seems like a strange one perhaps to you, but there are actually some people that seem to say, at least with their theology, God is not love, and seem to contradict this. You see, if it is true to say that God is love, it is not true to say that God is not love. That's not the Christian God, anyway. That might be a fitting description of Allah, the Islamic god. In Islam, you see, you don't feel close to god. That's almost an insult in Islam because god is so high, so sovereign, so capricious he could save you today and damn you tomorrow, and save you the next day, and you don't think of him as a father, a heavenly intimate father. God is not love and so you just try to do the five pillars of Islam because there's no Savior. You try to do them best you can and you just hope for the best. That's the extent of, the view of a religion that doesn't have a Savior.

So you've got Islam on one side with a capricious god, then you've got all these pagan religions on the other side where God is a cow or a tree or something that can't help you. You see, only Christianity, it's the only religion in the entire world where God is God but God also became man so that man could be brought back to God. There's no other religion in all the world that offers a Savior who does everything for a sinner who can do nothing, and then makes that sinner willing to give everything back out of love and gratitude to that Savior. There's no other religion in all the world that is so grounded in this concept, "We love God because he first loved us in and through his Son."

And so to say God is not love is blasphemy. Sometimes people don't say it quite that bluntly but they'll say something like this, "Love is merely one of God's attributes." What does that mean? If it's an attribute of God, it's who God is. God is love. You see, this is particularly the danger of what some have called hyper-Calvinism that says that God only loves his elect and doesn't have any kind of love whatsoever for other creatures he's made. Now God hates sin, the Bible says, and God hates sinners in a certain sense who persist in their sin unrepented of, but there's still a loving God, a certain kind of loving God for his creature. God is not a hateful, spiteful, capricious God. Now it's true he loves his elect in a special way that he does not love other people, but he's not a God as hyper-Calvinism often says who just doesn't love his creature in any way, so the offer of grace doesn't come to everyone who hears the Gospel, only to those who are already born again, sensible sinners who have some hope in mercy. No, that's not in the Bible either, is it? God has mercy upon the works of his hands. God does good to all, the Bible says. So to say God is not love is certainly contradictory not only to our text but to the whole Bible. The Bible says that God is love, in fact, he is not just love and he is not just barely love, but God is love and he turns away no sinner who comes to him. That's what the Bible says.

Now what does this mean, then? We've seen three things this does not mean, what are three things, then, that God is love does mean? 1. To say God is love means that God is love in his very essence. His very essence. You see, God is love, this expression comes from the operative verb in that sentence. God IS love. That tells us it's part of his essence. It's like other passages in the Bible that speak of who God is just using this operative verb. God is spirit. The Bible doesn't say God is a spirit but spirit is his very being. That's who he is. He doesn't have a corporeal body like us, he spirit. He has no material substance. That's who he is. That's his essence. Or think of God is light. That's who he is. There is no darkness in God at all. And so when the Bible says God is love, it's talking about his essence, within himself, his internal nature, not just his external relations with his creatures and his creation, but God is love in himself. He's not just loving to others, he is love. Way back in eternity before anything else existed, God existed and God, the Triune God existed and God is love in himself in his relationship to his other divine persons as well.

So we're talking about this is the very identity of God. We're talking about the eternal essence of God when we hear John say to us, "For God is love," and that cannot change. We heard about that New Year's Day, God is immutable, God is unchangeable, God cannot change in his attributes, God cannot not be love. God has always been love, God is love. God always will be love. So that's the first point, we need to nail that down in our minds, God is love in his very essence. That isn't some thing of God or some part of God. God has no parts. God is love. The love of God is simply God himself loving. It is the God who is love.

Now we're not saying here that God is love because he meets some high standard of love, maybe even a standard higher than we human mortals can reach. God is not truth because he's a higher standard of truth than you find in men. No, God is not simply at a higher level than us, God is altogether above and beyond us, separate from us in his attributes. We call them communicable, that is, able to be communicated, things like love and truth and justice, because there's a little semblance of them in us, but in the very essence that they are in God, he is in an altogether different category. We can speak truth and we can talk about truth and we can reflect truth, but God is truth. He's what truth is. And so it is with love. God just doesn't have a high standard of love, he is love.

So God doesn't just derive love from somebody else or from any thing, God is love from within himself. His love is self-generated. An illustration could be, I suppose, the sun and the moon in the sky, you know, the light that reflects from the moon really comes from the sun but the sun doesn't reflect light from anything, does it? The sun just radiates light. Well, God is like the sun. God is light, he's like that sun. He's love, he doesn't reflect it from some source outside of himself. The church has always been compared by the old divines to the moon. The church reflects the light or the love that God shines upon her and it's her calling to reflect that in the world. And so God gives us new hearts if we're believers and he makes us new creations so that we become reflectors of his love and his light, and then his love and his light change who we are from within and we gradually become more and more like him until the great day when we become really like him, although not in the kind of infinity that he has, but we become like him and we see him as

he is and we don't then have to cover our faces with shame because we're washed and forgiven in him, and we live with him forever in glory in a utopian marriage. We're in process here to that but, you see, God is pure, essential love in himself. And that he is together with the harmony of all his attributes within himself. God is holy love. God is just love. God is truthful love.

You see, if God is infinite in his love because he is love, that means we can never exhaust that love, and because we are finite, we can never get to the bottom of that love, says Paul, we can never get to the height of that love, we can never get to the depth of that love or the breadth of that love, rather, and so we're always, well, when it comes to the love of God, we're always like dipping our toes in the very edge of the ocean of his love. We're just talking baby talk. We're just babbling. We're just trying to put words together that begin to describe just a little bit of the ocean of the love, the inexhaustible love of God.

The love of God said Charles Spurgeon, has enough in it to go around, to fill us up in all our deepest valleys, and for all eternity, and then Spurgeon said, we can no more exhaust the infinite love of God than a little fish can drink up the oceans of the world. Then he paused and he said this, and I love this, "So drink on, little fish, you'll never drink the oceans dry." Oh, drink in, dear believer, drink in. Come, my beloved, drink ye all of it. Come and drink in the love of God that passes all understanding shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Spirit. What love the Father has that he has given his only begotten Son that we could be brought into this amazing love.

And you see, there's so much love in God that God doesn't have to ration it out. He doesn't have to do it like they do in California, there's not enough water so, you know, you have to have so much and you can only have so much, because otherwise we'll run out of water. God never runs out of love. If you drink in part of the ocean of love, you won't be able to see a decrease in that love because there's never a decrease in God's love. There's room in that love for the greatest of sinners. If there were a thousand worlds, said Martin Luther, one drop of the blood of Christ has the infinity within it to be sufficient to save a thousand worlds of sinners.

Oh, the love of God. That love he lavishes upon you, dear believer. It's the out-gushing of his heart of the core of his being. He lavishes it upon you and he says, "Drink all you want because there's more in my infinity than you'll be ever able to exhaust." He's absolutely pure in this love without even one micron of impurity. No wrong motives, no wrong desires, no wrong thoughts are ever found in his infinite love. You know, your best love, my best love, on our best day, our most sanctified day, our most godly day, is still penetrated by indwelling sin. Indwelling sin permeates the best of us in our best thoughts, our best words, our best actions, our best purest love, but in God there is no impurity, there's no fly in the ointment, there's no sin. God forbid, if God were to sin, God would not be God. God is pure essential love, and you see, that is just an incredible foundation for our feet, for our lives, and an incredible comfort. God is pure pure love.

So there's within the love of God, there's a kind of magnetism that draws a poor sinner who says, "I only deserve the wrath of God." When he hears about this love of God through his Son, a love that can be shown to us because infinite love in Jesus has satisfied the justice of an infinite God so that God can be just in his love, and when that penetrates the soul and the soul sees it, God has bound himself to God, to love each of the three persons of the Trinity, and through Jesus he can pour that love outside himself beyond himself, and through the satisfaction Jesus gave, he can love sinners with the very love with which he loves himself, John 17, that is so overwhelming that there's like a magnetic power in that love that draws a sinner to the cross, that draws the sinner to Jesus to find his all, as we heard this morning so beautifully from the sufferings of Christ, "I find my all in that Savior who was a curse for me and who took my hell for me and my death for me and my sin for me." That's all in Jesus and it's all completely free. Have you never been drawn by that love? Have you never cried out, "Draw me and I will run after thee"? Oh, the power, the beauty, the glory of the love of God.

God is love in his essence, but secondly, God is love means that God's love is essential to the Trinity itself, to his own identity. Think with me now, what was before time? Well, eternity, eternity past. No earth. No humans. No animals, boys and girls. No angels. Nothing but, what? God. God was all there was. How could God be love because love must have an object, isn't that true? And since God is love in his essence, God in his highest degree of love loves himself. There's no one else to love for God but himself. So if our highest duty is to love the Lord our God, I say it reverently, it is God's highest duty to love God and he does. He does. The same writer, John, says 17 times between his Gospel and his epistles that God loves his own Son. He does all things out of love for his Son. And you see, in God there's nothing wrong with loving himself because he is pure love and he's purity of everything. For us to love ourselves, we are to love ourselves in terms of loving the value of our soul, of course, but we are not to love ourselves in terms of, "Oh, I'm so perfect and I'm so good in myself," are we? Because we're not.

So for us, self-love is contrary to the purpose for which we were created. We were created to love God because he is pure love and he's worthy of pure love. But God himself, the Father loves the Son and the Spirit, the Spirit loves the Father and the Spirit loves the Father and the Son with perfect, pure, essential love. And this is the crowning element of our existence as well. Thomas Goodwin once said that when he tasted the love of God, he said, "It was as if God drew me to sit among the three divine persons and to share in the amazing love that they had for one another." And isn't that what heaven will be, tasting the love of God, for God, bound up within God yet poured out upon us?

You see, by its very definition love requires an object. It's a transitive verb. You love something or someone. But you say, "Well, how could God do that if God just loved himself from eternity?" Well, God is both the subject and the object here, God loving himself, there is only one God but there's three persons, and that's the beauty of Christianity over against Islam and Allah, a single solitary god who has no other persons in his existence, you see.

Now God loves God in the three persons, so he's a God who always exists in relationship. That's why John begins his Gospel saying, "In the beginning was the Word," that's Jesus, "and the Word was with God." It was not just the Father from eternity, there was the Father and the Son and the Spirit from eternity. And there is this marvelous reality forever and ever and ever that God is with God. That's why the world's most horrific moment which is also its most blessed moment is when the Son of God had to cry out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It wasn't that he lost his God-ness in that moment or he lost his awareness that he was the Son of God in that moment or that there was a cleavage between the first person and the second person of the Trinity, but he's crying this out in the depths of his humanity, that he's forsaken of God. And so it's overwhelming and even in the consciousness of Jesus on the cross, what's happening, you see, is that his Sonship in his own mind, in his own heart, in the totality of his feeling as he bears the curse and the wrath of God, his Sonship, as it were, recedes into the background and his sinner-ship, that is, his substitutionary sinner-ship that he who knew no sin became sin that we may be made the righteousness of God in him, that comes in the foreground and he's so overwhelmed that he doesn't cry out, "My Father, my Father," but he cries out, "My God, my God." This is the most overwhelming moment in all of human history, God forsaken of God, said Martin Luther, who can ever ever understand that?

Such is the love of God to you, dear child of God, and such is the price of sin, such is what God thinks of sin that he gave his own Son to the most horrific sufferings, the one whom he loved with superlative love, so that you may be brought into the stream of that love and may be wafted into that eternal Beulah of glory to be loved with a love of God with unspeakable love. You see, you can't think of the love of God without thinking of Trinitarian love. Proverbs 8 says, "I was daily," this is Jesus speaking here, "I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him." Isaiah 42:1 says, "Behold," this is God the Father speaking of the Messiah, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth."

This is perfect love. This is unique love. This is utopian love. When the Father beheld the Son, he took a delight in the Son. He looked at him and he saw the essence of all beauty and all goodness, and when he beheld the Son, he had a perfect smile, if I may say it so, from all eternity in this wonderful love of the Father for the Son. He enjoyed his own love to his Son and there was no break in that love. God always had more than enough love from all eternity, an infinite love, an immeasurable love for his own Son. There was always this wonderful, glorious, bosom-like relationship. A real relationship between the Father and the Son and God says, "If you love the Son, you love the Father also." Jesus said, "That the world may know that I love the Father." This is the beauty, the Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father. As the Father eternally loved the Son, the Son eternally received and returned that love unbroken, immediately, perfectly, without delaying, without hindrance, without interruption. Infinite love gives itself to an infinite object and it returns back infinite love because the Son and the Father are both infinite.

Robert Traill has a wonderful section, a great Puritan, in one of his books. I just want to read you four or five sentences here he says, "The love of one creature to another is



sometimes very great. The love of the believer for Christ is so great, or the love of God to his chosen greatly exceeds both and so does the love which Christ bears the church. But above all, beyond all these, is the love which the Father has to his own Son. In the first case it is a creature loving a creature, in the second it is a creature loving God, in the third it is God loving a creature, but in the fourth it is Christ loving his own body. In all either the subject or the object of the love is a creature but here is a paternal deity that loves and phileos with that Son deity that is beloved. Surely there must be a height and a depth, a length and a breadth here that passes all knowledge. The infinity of the Father to the Son secures all good to those whom the Son loves."

So God's love to God is never unrequited love. I'm sure there are people sitting in this church tonight who you feel you loved someone maybe when you were younger and they didn't respond in love. Unrequited love. You loved someone who doesn't return it. Or maybe, God forbid, you're in a marriage right now, I hope not, where you have a person who never responds to the love because never can believe that you love them. That's a huge problem in a marriage, you see. If you have loved somebody and they don't return it, it's a tragedy, isn't it? Or perhaps they loved you but they stopped loving you. They loved you once but they love you no more. That's the sad effects of sin in the world. That's never like that within God and it never will be like that within God. God's love is never unrequited love. It's never too late love. It's always return love. The Father and the Son always took this eternal love and poured it on each other and delighted in each other.

I know of no writer who plumbs the depths of this some much as Jonathan Edwards. He wrote a wonderful prolonged, long sermon, I don't think he preached it that long but "Heaven is a world of love," a total world of love, and at one point he says this, "The infinite essential love of God is, as it were, an infinite and eternal, mutual, holy energy between the Father and the Son, a pure holy act whereby the deity becomes an infinite and unchangeable act of love which proceeds from both the Father and the Son. 'Tis all a holy energy consisting in the infinite flame of pure love and holy delight that there is from all eternity between the Father and the Son, immensely loving and delighting and rejoicing in each other." Wow. It just takes your breath away, doesn't it? Whoever said that Calvinism is dry and boring? Whoever said it wasn't loving? This is amazing love. A Father loving the Son, a Son loving the Father, a self-perpetuating dynamo of holy love. This is good theology for the heart.

And the Holy Spirit, we are told, Romans 15:30, is involved in this mutual Trinitarian love. Romans 15:30 speaks of the love of the Spirit. The Spirit loves the Father and the Son and is loved by them in a deep and profound way. And the Spirit himself serves, the Bible tells us, as a kind of bond, a bond of love between the Father and the Son as well. The Father and the Son love each other in the Spirit and by the Spirit, and I know we're getting into the ocean above our heads, aren't we, but it's a beautiful thing. You know, I heard this story when I was going to Westminster Seminary, I had Cornelius V., was just a very profound theologian at Westminster. I saw him walking around campus, I never dared to introduce myself to him, I regret that until today. But someone asked him this, "What is the deepest thing that you could possibly meditate on in this world?" He said,

"Oh, it is definitely the ontological eternal Trinity. You are on holy ground just to meditate on the love between the members of the Trinity."

And thirdly, God is love and therefore God displays his love. Now we come into an area that's a little more understandable, isn't it? Out of love to each other, the members of the Trinity chose to allow that love to overflow themselves so that it might be displayed outside of God himself, externalized in his creation, and among his creatures and particularly among men, and among men particularly among his elect. God pours out his love to his people in his covenant of love to them that is just beyond all imagination. So God doesn't love everyone equally. He doesn't love everyone with that same profound saving love. He does love his creation. He does have a general love for his creature, but he has a special love for his people. That's what Jesus said so plainly in John 17. Jesus says, "I have declared unto them thy name, holy Father, and I will declare it, that the love wherewith thou hast loved me," Jesus said, "may be in them," that is the elect, "and I in them. I pray not for the world but I pray for those whom thou hast given me."

So if you are a true believer, you see, you belong to the elect and by belonging to the elect, you were created and chosen to be a love gift between the members of the Trinity. Think about that. Unworthy you, hell-deserving you, death-deserving you, was chosen, you were chosen to be the love gift, a love gift between the members of the Trinity. The Father gave you to the Son. And the Bible says the Father said to the Son, "Ask of me and I will give thee the heathen for thy inheritance." And the Son then agreed to give himself in order to win his bride, his elect to salvation, and to be their substitute, as we heard this morning, so that the elect can be given back to the Father and the Son can say on the great day, "Here am I, Father, and all those whom thou hast given me," and there will be no empty chairs in heaven that day, I assure you. The love gifts shall be complete.

So the Father, the Son and the Spirit within themselves to all eternity, they had this love but in creating things to display it, the things they create became not only the gifts between one another but they became the conduits of the very love itself. So the love of the Father by the Son flows through us by the Holy Spirit, Romans 5:5, he sheds abroad the love of God in our hearts so that we, in turn, may love him because he first loved us, and our love may flow back through Jesus back to the Father. It's a chain of love and we are caught up in this amazing conduit of divine eternal love. That's why I always quote to you, you've heard it a dozen times, I'm going to say it once more, Samuel Rutherford's famous statement, "I know not which divine person I love the most but this I know, I love each of them and I need them all." You see, you're caught up in that Trinitarian love when you're a true Christian and you want to know more of that love and more of that love and more of that love, and the more you know of it the more you understand, as Rutherford said elsewhere, Christ Incarnate is not but love covered with flesh. This is the love of God in human form, Jesus, willing to be the Savior of the greatest of sinners. Great is the mystery of godliness. God manifest in the flesh. "Herein is love," says John, "for God is love."

How should we then live? Three things briefly. We should live as treasurers, that is, we should treasure the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, Romans 5:5, "hope maketh not

ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." As we go through this year, as we go through this decade, this is what we should treasure more and more, "Fill me, O God, with a shed abroad love that the Holy Spirit pours into the heart coming from the Father, the Son and the Spirit through his word, through the Gospel, that I may treasure this love."

You know, when you have a wonderful marriage relationship, you just love your spouse so much, you just can't imagine, you can't imagine the thought of it, it scares the wits out of you, of living without your spouse, and you know that day will come when one of you must die, or both of you must die. It could be this decade. It could be this year. But you see, this love never, not even for a flicker of a moment, if you both die in the Lord, of course, that love will never be gone but it won't be the same when you can't see each other in this life, and it will be perfect in the life to come, but the love of God shed abroad in the soul is even a greater love, a much greater love, a love that will never die even for a moment.

So you want to feel that love, you want to know that love, you want to swim in the ocean of that love. That's the way to live, to love God because he first loved me, and once you treasure that love, once you taste that love, once that love conquers you, you know, may I say to young people and children, then all the things you could possibly love in this world, they kind of go gray and dim and the love of Christ is three-dimensional, as it were, and through his Son, through his Incarnation, and it's beautiful and it's colorful and it's rich and full, and it's so much bigger than who you are, and if you are caught up in the love of Christ, if you're caught up in not belonging to yourself but belonging to him who gave himself for you, your life is so much bigger, so much more expansive, so much richer than it could ever be with any of the toys and trinkets or loves of this world. Treasure, treasure this love. There's nothing like it. This world is so poor, so poor compared to this love.

2. Worshipers. What should this love make us? This love should not only make us treasurers, it should make us worshipers, and that's, after all, why we were created, to worship God. So it's when we are caught up in this love and we respond to this love with love that we're actually at least partially despite our indwelling sin, living for the purpose for which God put us here on this earth. If Jesus loves you with the same eternal, unchangeable, infinite love with which the Father loves his Son, as he says he does, John 15:9, "As my Father has loved me, so love I you," don't you just want to break out in worship and just adore him with all your affections and your emotions and your will and your body and your soul and your mind and your spirit and your conscience? "I want to worship him with the whole man, and want to bow before him in and through the Spirit, through Jesus Christ, by the word in accord with his will, and bring him all the honor and all the glory that belong to him alone." That's what worship is. "I want to be so caught up in this love that I forget myself with a holy self-forgetfulness." As Jonathan Edwards said, "The best moments of my life are those moments when I've been caught up above and beyond my own salvation, and been caught up to see the love of God and to praise that God and worship that God in self-forgetfulness, and just adore him for who he is." Oh, may this love make you a worshiper.

This is the holiest, the best, the most important activity you could ever engage in this world, to worship the Triune God, and when you do that, you want to do that self-sacrificially. Not just forgetting about yourself but centering upon God. You want to love him, as Jesus said, with your heart, your mind, your soul, your strength. Isn't it beautiful that the most beautiful thing in this world, to love God back for his love to you, so that you adore him and worship him and glory and him, that that very thing gives you more joy than anything else in this world? I could tell you the best moments of my life have been when I've been worshiping God. I wish I did it more. I wish I knew it much deeper. But those are by far the best moments. Those are the unforgettable moments when you can truly say, "I worshiped him in spirit and truth."

There's a beautiful self-denial in worshiping God, in enjoying that worship. That's the fruit of the worship itself. You see, true happiness you never get, boys and girls, young people, you never get true happiness by looking for true happiness. True happiness is a byproduct of holiness and worship. You get true happiness as something that just happens to you as a fruit of worshiping God. That's how we should live, loving him, worshiping him because he first loved us.

And finally 3, we should love one another self-sacrificially out of the love of Christ. So how should we live? Treasurers, worshipers, and lovers of one another. That's what John is saying all throughout this chapter, isn't it? In fact, he actually says a believer should be willing to die for another believer out of so much love, because the love of Christ, love is so great that Christ died for us, and when his love is in us, we ought to be willing to die for one another. I think I told you once I sat next to a guy, I forget if he was from the Marines or a Green Beret or what, but he was one of the higher higher military services, one of the more demanding one's, and he was telling me, I think it was the Marines. He was telling me that one Marine, they are so well-trained that one Marine would be willing to walk out onto the field in the midst of bullets at the risk of his own life to pull in a wounded comrade. This was not make-believe, they would really do that because one brother's life is considered as his own, and you'd never leave a wounded comrade behind, he said. You see, and that's the kind of love that Christian should have for one another, that love that flows into us from Christ should make us so love each other that we just want to build each other up and encourage each other and help each other and care for each other and reach out to each other, and for a Christian to criticize another Christian rashly is wicked. John says, "If you hate your brother, the love of God is not in you."

How should we then live? We should love one another. We should love one another and that love, John says, is expressed in likeness. What does he mean by that? He means that as you have the love of Christ poured out in you, the love of God poured out in you, you become more like God, you become more conformed to Christ, and so you are growing in Christ-likeness, and then as you reach out to your brother and sister in Christ and you love them, you're actually assisting them to grow in Christ-likeness as well because they will go out, hopefully in response to your love, and love one another, love someone else with that same Christian love. And so there is centered in God a love that God pours out

over himself that he pours onto his people, and those people then pour onto other people, also to unsaved people, manifesting the love of God that passes all understanding.

So John says that everyone who truly loves has been born of God. You see, by nature we are too selfish to be truly lovers of one another in the best sense of the word. Martin Luther said sin turns us in upon ourselves. We do not naturally reach out to serve others in selfless, self-sacrificing love, but when the Spirit of God breaks into our lives and we are born of God, God shows us his love for us in Christ and he plants within us the seed of a new beginning; he stirs within us a love toward all those who belong to Christ.

So Christian love, said John Owen, is to be as unconfined as the beams of the sun. It doesn't select on whom it will shine its beams but it wants to shine the love of God everywhere. That's my wish for you and for me, not just on the Sabbaths of 2020 and the 2020s decade, but to penetrate our daily lives. God is love. Pray God, I pray God it will move you to worship him, to love him, and to love each other. Amen.

*Gracious God, we bow before thee and confess how poor we are at loving compared to what we ought to be. Please help us grow up spiritually in the love of God that passes all understanding, and then in the love of each other that also passes all understanding, so that we might be God worshipers, lovers of one another out of loving the Triune God who gave this to us because he loved us with an unspeakable love. Lord, help every unconverted person here tonight to realize what they're missing. They're missing what life is all about, and help them to repent of their sin, to bow before the Lord of glory, to fall upon him, his mercy and his love and say, "I surrender, Lord, my poor sinful life to thee for thou hast said, 'Him who cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.'" Oh, please Lord, let the unsaved be saved and taste the joy, the beauty, the power, the richness, the infinitude of thy amazing love. But also let thy people grow in it this year, every year of this decade, that we would grow, grow, grow in the grace and knowledge and love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Help us, Lord. Save us from ourselves and help us to swim, to drink in something of the infinity of the ocean of thy love. In Jesus' name. Amen.*