

December 25, 2016  
Sunday Morning Service  
Christmas  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
© 2016 David J. Whitcomb

*To Ponder . . .*

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from 1 John 4:10.

1. How many descriptions of “love” can you think of?
2. Why do you think love is such a confusing issue?
3. How can we help people comprehend the fact that God’s love caused the suffering and death of God the Son?
4. How important is the deity of God the Son?
5. How important is the full humanity of God the Son?
6. Does the virgin conception of Christ matter?

**THIS IS LOVE**  
**1 John 4:10**

Merry Christmas! What is so attractive about this holiday? It’s the season of love. Everyone knows that. As soon as Halloween is over, the Hallmark Channel begins showing endless movies about how couples fall in love during the Christmas holiday. There are countless heart touching stories broadcast this time of year about love expressed by and for dogs or horses or estranged family members and even strangers. More tears of joy are shed, more lumps in the throat are experienced this time of the year than any other time.

Just look around. You can see the word “Love” spelled out in red and green letters everywhere. That is why we virtually expect all

kinds of expressions of love during the holiday. Neighbors reach out to the difficult neighbor down the street because it’s Christmas. Bosses who demand slave-like submission from the employees all year actually slip a little bonus in the poor slaves’ checks because that’s what Christmas is all about. In fact, Christmas is a very difficult time of year for many because they think about the love that is missing from a dearly beloved one who has passed on, or a spouse who pledged that undying love only to walk out the door for someone else.

With all these expressions of love and the flood of emphasis on love, we should pretty much agree about what constitutes love, right? “What is love?” almost sounds like a foolish question. You might be tempted to answer that question by: “Well just look around! Are you so dense that you can’t tell what love is?”

Actually, it is the wise and honest person who might look around at the profundity of loving expressions and conclude that few people actually understand what love is, and that all this holiday cheer and gaiety should not be confused with love. Maybe Christians should be the first people to question the validity of this season of love—not in a cynical way, but in a desire to be deeply, firmly rooted in the confidence of God’s love.

John the Apostle wrote to believers who trusted Christ and who depended wholly on His finished work for salvation even though it often cost them much pain and difficulty. He explained some true and important facts about their world which was pretty much the same as our world.

John indicated that there is often a lot of confusion about love because there are a lot of false spirits that stimulate a lot of false teachers to teach a lot of error about love. *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already (vv.1-3).*

Therefore, it is not surprising that the next warning John offered us who trust Christ is that people of the world do not understand what we understand and, therefore, they do not speak like we speak. *Little*

children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error (vv.4-6). That alone could cause much confusion about love.

Because we are contrasted with the false teachers and the overall spirit of error and confusion in the world, we must conclude that children of God are special. And because we are special, we really ought to love each other. *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love (vv.7-8).*

And we all say, “Of course.” Especially because it is Christmas we are going to be quite zealous about showing love to each other. Okay, what will you do? What is love really like? Is it really just a matter of giving each other future yard sale items? What is love? Maybe John was thinking, “I’m glad you asked,” as he penned verse ten. This is love. This is the story of Christmas.

### **Love Defined.**

John told us, *In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us.* In this simple statement we discover first what love is not. Love is not a feeling or experience in spite of what all our experiences in life might seem to prove. Notice that John did not write, “This is what love feels like.” Nor did he write, “This is what love looks like.” Because our total human experience is relegated to this world, we tend to define things like love according to our limited experience.

Therefore, the common understanding and agreed upon definition of love is that it is a strong feeling. This conclusion is most obviously borne out by typical dictionary definitions of love. According to most dictionaries, the noun love speaks of an intense feeling of deep affection, fondness, tenderness, warmth, intimacy. Who would argue with that meaning? Of course that is love according to human experience. That is why the love portrayed during the

Christmas season is all about warm sweaters, hot chocolate, and a fire in the fireplace. Most of us have experienced this kind of warm feeling toward another person(s), a dog or cat, or even an intangible object.

Also, according to most dictionary definitions, love used as a verb means to feel a deep romantic or sexual attraction to someone. That is why what our culture calls love is almost always a physical or emotional attraction. Sadly, what we hear termed as love on television is almost always actually lust. We have recently come face to face with that problem in our study in the life of David. His son Amnon’s strong attraction to his half-sister Tamar might be commonly called love, but it was clearly lust. He had a strong and unrighteous passion for her which quickly changed to hate once he had abused her. That is not love.

John was precisely correct when he warned that many false teachers have confused the truth—especially the truth about what constitutes real love. Common sense tells us that the love that comes from God is not a hot passion like lust or even a warm attraction toward us. Indeed. God’s love has to be something more meaningful and substantial than that. We have learned too many times that such human love is fickle and undependable. If that is God’s love toward us, we are in deep trouble. And, by the way, that is not the kind of love God expects us to show each other.

It makes sense that the love God shows us is not like the fickle, lustful, ever-changing expressions of human love. What then is love? Again, in a negative sense, John taught us that we do not initiate real love. Love is not defined in that we loved God. We did not establish the meaning of love by our response to God our Creator.

The pronoun “we” refers to the whole of the human race. The whole of the human race is represented by the first man and woman Adam and Eve. We have all descended from the first humans God created. How did they respond to God our Creator? They certainly didn’t initiate love for God. They disobeyed, brought sin into the world, lied about it, and then tried to shift the blame. That response doesn’t qualify as love by even the weakest, broadest definition.

So what is love? The simple answer is that love is God. Very simply this means that two parties are required for love. There must be an initiator of love and a recipient of love for a relationship of love

to exist. In the most basic understand of the love relationship, there is God and us. The entire story of the Bible, from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21, is the story of these two parties—God and us.

We will consider the character and traits of God, the perfect partner in the love relationship, in a moment. First, let's ask what we know about ourselves, about the "us" of the relationship. We know that God created us in His image. In creation, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit concluded: "*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness*" (Genesis 1:26). The result is that in certain ways, some we do not understand, we humans reflect the person and character of God. It is doubtful that we look like God since He is a spirit and spirits have no appearance. However, we do reflect the image of God in that we demonstrate some of His traits such as love, anger, creativity, a will, and such.

In fact, God our Creator intended that everything we do should reflect His glory, His majestic character. That is what Paul meant when he instructed the believers in Corinth, *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God* (1 Corinthians 10:31). Reflecting our Creator's majestic character is what David referred to when he sang, *Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness* (Psalm 29:2).

Because God created us to reflect His character, we are not surprised to also learn that God created us to enjoy fellowship with Him. The first picture we see of God and humans interacting in the Bible was of them walking together in the garden. That truth led Solomon to conclude that *The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man* (Ecclesiastes 12:13). So the Westminster Confession of Faith begins by stating that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. How is that working out?

By nature we are the polar opposite of what God intended for us to be. The sad truth about the whole human race is stated in the closing words of Romans chapter one.

*For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling*

*mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (Romans 1:21-25).*

And so we are all alike at birth (according to multiple statements in the Bible which Paul drew together in his letter to Christians in Rome):

*As it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known." "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Romans 3:10-18).*

In light of this Bible evidence, suffice it to say that **WE** do not initiate love. We can easily stimulate anger or grief or sorrow or suspicion or jealousy and envy or even lust and affection. But we cannot stimulate love. Real love is not from us.

Real love comes from God. God sets the standard for love. It is *not that we have loved God but that he loved us*. Considering what we just concluded about the human race, we must wonder how God could ever love people. How can He love us who reject His authority over us as Creator? How can He love us who reject His word He has given in our Bible? How can He love us who drastically change the purpose for which He created us from reflecting His glory to doing our own will? How can the Creator love us who are faithful to, friends with, and happy to serve His enemy Satan?

It is difficult for us to understand this because our ideas of love are relegated to finite human experience. But God's love is unique. It is different from all that we know in human experience. God

demonstrates His love from the beginning to the end of the Bible. In this story, we discover that God's love is a conscious choice. God does not love anyone because he or she deserves it. No one deserves God's love because everyone has walked away from Him. Rather, because God created all things for His own glory, He chooses to love all failing, faltering humans. To that end, God reveals His love as *a conscience decision to do the very best for the objects of His love even if it requires sacrifice*. That kind of love is far beyond the scope of human love that is offered to favorable objects, faithful objects, beautiful objects.

So John taught, "This is love — God loved us." His love is not just a feeling. Review the definition. God's love is "a conscience decision to **do** . . ." Real love is active. Imagine how your children would respond if they got out of bed early, went to the Christmas tree, and discovered there were no presents? Then pious Mom and Dad gather the children around and say, "This year we just wanted you children to know that we love you so much and that is why there are no presents." There is something in the human nature that expects love to be demonstrated. Would a wife feel loved if her husband told her on their wedding day that he loves her, but then never hugged her, never kissed her, never wanted to talk to her, never wanted to be around her? Not hardly!

What does God do in order to show His love for His created beings? Because God's love is so incredible, so beyond human comprehension, His demonstration of that love is also beyond human comprehension.

### Love Described.

God loves and because He loves He *sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins*. Love is Christmas. God the Father sent God the Son. This statement is made plain in the verse that precedes our text: *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 (1 John 4:9)*. Just the words, "God sent His Son" defy human comprehension. Who or what is the Son? If there is one God, who is the Son? Didn't God the Creator tell the people in the nation of Israel,

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4)? Then who is the sent Son?

He is the *only* Son. Human experience demands that a son be born. That causes much confusion because it demands that God the Son must be a created being just like we are. This is why the teaching of Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses and other cults relegate Jesus Christ to a secondary position, like a created being—even to the heresy that Christ is brother to Satan the created angel.

But if God the Son was created just like we are, then He is born in sin. If God the Son was Jesus of Nazareth and born by natural process to Mary and Joseph, He was no different than you or me. If He is no different than us, He is not qualified to save us or redeem us or to satisfy God's wrath against our sins.

That is why it is important for us to see that John used a special term to speak of the Son. John said the Son is *monogeneis* (*only Son* or *only begotten* (KJV)). The term speaks of the unique Son. The word is used to highlight the unique character as the only one. John used it to describe God the Son who is co-eternal with God the Father when he wrote, *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14)*. And also, *No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known (John 1:18)*. Jesus used the word Himself to help Nicodemus understand spiritual birth. He told the teacher, *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16)*. He also said, *"Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (John 3:18)*.

God the Son, the expression of God's love, had to be unique. He had to be fully God, completely sinless, or He could not pay the price of redemption from sin. At the same time, He had to be fully human, completely familiar with our temptations, or He could not identify with sinners. He had to be *monogeneis*, the unique Son, co-equal with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

The Father sent the Son with purpose. The word for *sent* means to send a representative to do a particular task with the sender's full authority. It is the word that would describe a king sending his

ambassador to convey his message. Because God the Father loves His created beings, He sent God the Son to this earth to accomplish a particular task—a task that only God the Son could accomplish. He had to be sent in a particular way, born of a virgin by God the Holy Spirit. We call it incarnation when God became one of us. We celebrate that sending as Christmas.

And what was the task to which God the Father sent God the Son on Christmas? God's love is the expression of satisfaction. John taught us that Jesus Christ is the "satisfier." He essentially said, "This is love: God the Father sent God the Son to satisfy His wrath against my sins." That is what is meant by the phrase, *sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins*.

Jesus Christ, God the Son, was born like us in order to meet the demands of sin. It is the story told throughout the Bible. When sin entered the world, God promised that the Seed of the woman would one day fully defeat Satan, the author of sin (Gen. 3:15). God chose a particular man to be the father of a particular people group, through whom He would provide the "Redeemer, the One who satisfies" (Gen. 12:3). That father of the Jewish race promised that one day, "God will provide for himself the lamb for the sacrificial offering" (Gen. 22:8). From that man Abraham came the great nation of Israel to whom God gave the law and covenants.

Part of God's law was for the people to gather at the ark of the covenant at the tabernacle once each year. It was called the Day of Atonement. On that day, the high priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice on the mercy seat which sat on top of the ark. This annual observance was a symbol of God's wrath for the peoples' sins being appeased by the blood of the sacrifice. God's promise was: "*There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel*" (Exodus 25:22).

But repeating it year after year caused the people to long for one final sacrifice that would satisfy God's wrath against sin forever. The purpose of the sacrifices was to point peoples' hearts toward the Promised Messiah, Redeemer, the One who would satisfy. God the Father sent God the Son to be the propitiation. The word propitiation speaks of the means of appeasing, satisfying. The Greek word

(*hilastrian*) is the same word that would translate the Hebrew word for "mercy seat." The sprinkled blood of thousands of bulls and goats symbolized the work that Jesus would do when He died on the cross. God Himself gave the greatest of gifts when He sent the sacrifice of God the Son to satisfy the cost of sin.

Most important is that God the Son satisfies God's wrath against my sin. Because He loves me, He did something to show His love. He sent the substitute for my sin. That price is applied to cover the offense of my sin against my Creator through my full and complete trust in God's plan and promises.

What kind of ingratitude would leave a Christmas gift unopened? What kind of ingratitude would look at the gift and then turn away and ask, "Is there anything else?" God has revealed to us real love, eternal love, the only kind of love that matters, by sending to us in Jesus Christ, the price required to satisfy the cost of our sins. That is love. This is the answer to the most important prayer we can pray: "*Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us, and atone for our sins, for your name's sake!*" (Psalm 79:9). The person who has come to grips with their sin against the Creator will greatly sense the need for the price of satisfaction against God's wrath to be applied to them. People who see the great need will cry to God for help. God has helped us because He loves us!