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## 1 John 4:7-12 “Why We Should Love One Another”

Intro. Once again, the apostle John returns to the subject of love. In fact, the word “love” occurs 46 times in this epistle. My text begins the third treatment by John on this subject. I believe that this is the greatest passage on the subject of love written by the apostle John. Tradition says that the apostle John was always emphasizing this important commandment. For a number of years, he was the pastor of the church in Ephesus, and they must have heard him preach about love many times. Sometimes people would complain about John saying so much about this subject. But John emphasized our obligation to love because Jesus Himself said that love is the most important commandment of all.

What John does is this: he starts off with an appeal that we love one another. So often John must have exhorted Christians to love one another. But why is this appeal even necessary? Aren't people just going to love anyway? Well, you know the answer to that. With the exception of parental love, true love is not something we do by nature. By nature, we are sinners. By nature, we are self-centered. We will not love one another unless God fills us with His love, and unless we are encouraged to share that love. And then he gives several reasons why we should love one another. The first reason is found in the last of v.7, “for love is of God.” So I am going to share with you three reasons we should love one another from this text. Let me restate the first reason. We should love one another:

### I. BECAUSE OF OUR NEW NATURE FROM GOD

God not only commands us to love; He *enables* us to love by the new birth. Notice how John develops his point. He points out that fact that:

A. Love Is God's Nature - John traces love to its source and when he arrives at the fountainhead of love he says, “Love is of God (v.7a) ... for God is love” (v.8b). The translation could read, “God as to His nature is love.” Love is such an integral part of His very essence that He cannot exist without loving.

I believe it is important to briefly describe the kind of love God is by nature. Much that is called “love” in modern society bears no resemblance or relationship to the holy, spiritual love of God. *Agape* is the Greek word that was selected to describe this word. *Agape* love is not an emotion which rises in the heart of God; it is a principle by which God lives. *Agape* is indifferent to the merit of the object loved. It has to do with the will. *Agape* love is supremely a giving love.

A God of love was very unique in the ancient world. Never would the people of pagan religions have declared that their god was a god of love. Search the pantheon of deities in ancient Greece, and you will not find a god of unselfish, giving love.

Years ago a lady who prided herself on belonging to the intelligentsia said to biblical commentator Harry Ironside, “I have no use for the Bible, for Christian superstition, and religious dogma. It is enough for me to know that God is love. “Well,” he said, “How did you find out that God is love?” “Why,” she said, “everyone knows that.” Ironside replied, “Do they know it yonder in India? That poor mother in her distress throwing her little babe into the holy

Ganges to be eaten by filthy and repulsive crocodiles as a sacrifice for her sins—does she know that God is love?” “Oh, well, she is ignorant and superstitious,” she replied. Ironside continued, “Those poor wretched people in the jungles of Africa, bowing down to gods of wood and stone, and in constant fear of their fetishes, the poor heathen in other countries, do they know that God is love?” “Perhaps not,” she said, “but in a civilized land we all know it.” “But how is it that we know it? Who told us so? Where did we find it out?” Ironside went on to point out to her that no one in the world ever knew it until it was revealed from heaven and recorded in the Word of God. It is not found in all the literature of the ancients. (pp.137-38; Illus. #C-1552).

Thankfully, the love of God has been revealed to us, and we can rejoice in His loving character. Now building on the fact of God’s love, notice what follows from that truth:

B. Born Again Christians Have Received God’s Loving Nature – John says in v.7, “...everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.” Jesus said a tree is known by its fruit. If we bear the fruit of love, then that is a good indication that we have been born of God. When a child is born, that child inherits the nature of his parents. Even so, when a person has been “born of God,” he shares God’s divine nature. Since “God is love,” Christians should likewise have God’s nature of love. The logic is unanswerable! And John clearly implies here that we are to love, not simply with human affection, but with the very love of God that we have received from Him. Being possessed of a new and divine nature, the “natural” thing for the believer in the Lord Jesus is to love. By the way, this is another reason why we must be born again, because we cannot love the way God wants us to apart from the new birth.

C. What a Lack of Love Indicates – In v.8 John says, “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” Now remember, it is the lack of *agape* love that we are talking about here. Also, love is a present tense. If you do not practice *agape* love on a regular basis, then there is reason to doubt that you have been born again.<sup>1</sup>

So the first reason we should love one another is because we have inherited God’s loving nature, and loving others demonstrates that we have been born again. If we do not practice godly love to others, then we need to be born again! That will cure that problem!

Now let’s look at the second reason why we should love one another:

## II. BECAUSE OF THE EXAMPLE OF GOD

A child will be like his father by inheriting certain genetic traits. But another way a child becomes like his parents is by imitating their example. Here in this text John shares four ways the love of God was demonstrated, setting an example for us:

A. He Gave His Only Begotten Son – In v. 9 John says, “In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world....” No greater gift was possible. Others are sons by creation, as Adam was, and as angels are, or by new birth, as believers are, but Jesus is the unique Son. Think of it! God, the Father, loved a world dead in trespasses and sins in such a way that He gave His unique Son, the darling of His bosom, that we might live unto Him. Oh, what it cost God to love us! It ought to fill our hearts with gratitude and praise that God loved us enough—not to send an angel, not to send some other kind of heavenly

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<sup>1</sup> Notice the contrast in tenses in vv.7 & 8. In v.7 “know” is present, which describes our relationship to God that we keep on knowing God. But in v.8 it is aorist. The unsaved person has never come to know God.

being to represent Him, but God was willing to deprive Himself of the fellowship of His only Son in order that He might come into this world to be the Savior. Think about the time when God got ready to send His Son into this world. What a sendoff Jesus must have been given as He departed from heaven.

There are other examples of this kind of love. Think of the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac: "Seeing thou hast not withheld from Me thine only son" (KJV). Think of a mother and dad sending off their only son to fight for the freedom of our country. What a sacrifice! Would you have enough love for others to sacrifice your only son?

B. He Gives Eternal Life - V.9 also says that God "sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him." True love will seek to meet the needs of the one being loved. Eph. 2:2 says that before we are saved, we are dead in sin. Jn. 3:16 says that we would perish if God did not intervene. We, who were dead in sin needed life, eternal life. And so we read in the last of v.9 that God sent His Son on a special mission for a special purpose, "that we might live through Him." 1 Jn. 5:12 says, "He who has the Son has life...."

One application that we should make from this point is that we should have a similar love for one another. We should be willing to give to meet the needs for others, whether that need is physical, social, psychological, or spiritual. God had that kind of love, and so should we. I wonder if anyone had reached out to that 17-year-old Texas teenager who murdered 10 people and wounded 10 others at his school? His family was involved in the Greek Orthodox Church. He probably had quit going. Perhaps those lives could have been saved if he had been loved instead of bullied and isolated.

C. He Loves Unconditionally – In v.10 John says, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us...." This kind of unconditional love is even found in the Old Testament, in Dt. 7:7-8, "The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you...." In the expression, "Herein is love," the definite article appears before the word "love," not any kind of love, but the particular love that God possesses by nature. He loves, not because we love Him, but because His nature is to love. God's particular kind of love is unconditional. As a rule, we love because we recognize in the other person something that is loveable. Or we love because that other person loves us and does things for us that we like. But that is not why God loves us. We were alienated from God. We had even no desire for his friendship and favor. In spite of this, He showed the greatness of His love for us by giving His Son to die for His enemies. He loved us, not because He approved our character, but because He desired our welfare. It is God who came out to us; we did not seek after Him. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrated His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Now there are two implications of this wonderful truth. First, we should apply this to the kind of love we should have for one another. We too, should love unconditionally. We remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in Mt. 5:46, "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?" Don't wait on people to love you. Take the initiative in showing love to others.

Secondly, if God's love is not evoked by anything in His creatures, then it is universal, and we do not need anxiously to question ourselves whether we deserve His love, and no conscious unworthiness need ever make us falter in the least in the firmness with which we grasp the wonderful truth of His great love.

D. His Love Involved the Greatest Sacrifice – In v.9 we read that God sent His Son, but in v.10 we read of a greater sacrifice. In the last of v.10 John says that Jesus was willing to become “the propitiation for our sins.” That word “propitiation” refers to the satisfaction of divine wrath. So notice first of all:

1. The Need for Propitiation - It is true that God is love. But we also read in the Bible that God is holy and righteous. In chapter 1, v.5 John says, “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.” He is absolutely pure and holy. God cannot, being what He is, treat sin as if it were not sin; and therefore we read, “He sent His son to be the propitiation for our sins.” God’s love never operates in a fashion contrary to His righteousness. And so what the holiness of God demanded, the love of God provided. These two aspects of the nature of God are both seen in the work of propitiation. There must first be the propitiation for our sins, and then that mighty love reaches its purpose and attains its end, and can give us the life of God to be the life of our souls.

2. The Cost of Propitiation - Think of what it cost Jesus to be our propitiation for sin. For example, when the Greek translators of the Old Testament came to the word translated “mercy seat,” they used the Greek word that John employs here. The mercy seat covered the ark of the covenant, containing the 10 commandments. Israel had broken the 10 commandments, and yet God provided that sacrificial blood could be sprinkled upon the “mercy seat” to satisfy His wrath against sin and provide forgiveness, a covering for sin. A sacrificial animal had to die in order to provide propitiation. Even so Rom. 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” In order to give us eternal life, Jesus had to die in our place. Heb. 9:22 says “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin.”

In v.11 John makes an application regarding God’s example of love. He says, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” “If” should be translated here “since”, a condition of the first class. God has indeed clearly demonstrated His love for us.

Sometimes when something bad happens to us, we may doubt God’s love for us. Whenever you have doubts of God’s love, look to the cross! As in John 3:16, “so loved” (*houtos*) emphasizes the manifestation of God’s love both in its manner and in its extent, though the emphasis is on the latter. I have just described the manner and extent of God’s love.

The key word in this verse is “ought” (*opheilo*). It is a very strong term expressing moral obligation and duty. If God has loved those who were so inferior and so unworthy, we ought to love those who are on a level with us. If we have been recipients of such love, we certainly ought to extend the same kind of love to others. We should love as God has loved us, by meeting needs, by loving sacrificially and unconditionally.

Now there is a third reason why we should love one another:

### III. BECAUSE OF OUR WITNESS FOR GOD

Christian love is one of the most powerful witnesses we have in this world. Let’s see how John develops that argument. Consider with me first:

A. The Problem of Our Inability to See God – In v.12 John says, “No one has seen God at any time.” God is spirit; He is invisible. So many people live as though God does not exist. But we Christians should so live and so love that people can see God in us. He is invisible to human eyes, unless He manifests Himself in some way. So how can people “see” the invisible God, and know that He really exists?

B. The Potential of “Seeing” God’s Love in Us – In v.12 John says, “If we love one another, God abides in us....” People can see that God is living in us when we demonstrate God’s love to others. A great many people never read the Gospel according to Matthew, or Mark, or Luke, or John. But they are reading the Gospel according to you; they are watching you, listening to what you say, observing what you do, and getting their ideas of Christ and their ideas of God from what they see in you. The world is never going to be convinced Christianity is real if Christians do not love one another.

1. Because God Can Dwell in Us - Though God is invisible, He yet is not only very near to us but may be in us, the Life of our lives.

And look at v.9. Notice that God’s love is manifested “in us.” Believers are the medium in which love was revealed and in which it was effective.

2. Because God’s Love Can Be Perfected in Us - Notice it is the love “of God” that we can have, but this love should become our very own. In v.12 John also says, “His love has been perfected in us.” “Perfected” (*teleioo*) means “to bring to completion, to accomplish, finish.” It is not that our love becomes perfect. But without expressing the love of God to others, His love will not accomplish what it was designed to accomplish. If saints have this *agape* love habitually for one another, that shows that this love has accomplished its purpose in their lives. And one main purpose God’s love is to fulfill in our lives is the evangelism of the lost.

Conclusion: A number of years ago Harry Ironside was in Arizona visiting a Presbyterian Mission. In the hospital there was a poor Navajo woman who had been in a most desperate condition but had been nursed back to life and health through the Christian missionary doctor and the consecrated nurses. She was a poor heathen woman and had had a most dreadful experience. She had been cast out by her own people when they thought she was going to die, and had been thrown behind a clump of brush and left there for three or four days in mid-August, when the heat is terrific during the day time and the nights become bitterly cold. There she lay without food or drink, suffering dreadfully. This missionary doctor found her there, brought her to the hospital, and did everything that Christian love and surgical skill could suggest, and at last brought her back to health. After nine weeks in the hospital, she began to wonder about everything, and said to the nurse, “I can’t understand it. Why did he do all that for me? He is a white man and I am an Indian. My own people threw me out; I can’t understand it. I never heard of anything like this before.” The Navajo nurse, a sweet Christian girl, said to her, “You know, it is the love of Christ that made him do that.” “What do you mean by the love of Christ? Who is this Christ? Tell me more about Him.” The nurse did not think that she could tell it in the right way and so called the missionary. He sat down and talked to her, and day by day unfolded the wonderful story. After some weeks (for she could take in only a little at a time) they thought she understood enough to make her decision. They had a special prayer-meeting for her, and then gathered around that bed and prayed that God by His Spirit would open her blind eyes. Again they told the story, and then said, “Can’t you trust this Savior, turn from the idols you have worshiped, and trust Him as the Son of the living God?” She looked at them with her big dark Indian eyes and was silent a long time, and then the door yonder opened and the doctor stepped in. Her face lit up and she said, “If Jesus is anything like the doctor, I can trust Him forever,” and she came to Christ. Do you see what had reached her? She had seen divine love manifested in a man. That is what you and I are called to exhibit to the world. (Ironside, pp.152-53). Let us go and do likewise!

Sources: Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the Old & New Testaments: James – Jude* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975 reprint); H.A. Ironside, *Epistles of John & Jude* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers 1931); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 16 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures, Vol. VI* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931); Curtis Vaughan, *A Study Guide Commentary: 1,2,3 John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970); Jerry Vines, *Family Fellowship: An Expository Experience in 1 John* (Dallas: Crescendo Publications, 1976); B.F. Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1883, 1966 edition); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Real: 1 John* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1972); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 2, 1 John (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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