

Love One Another

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Well, one of the things that as we talk about the sovereign care of God and the providential way that he has of directing all things, one of the things that I think is always important for us to emphasize as we teach to counsel one another and to encourage each other with and to remember deeply in our hearts is this fact, that God's sovereignty is something that he exercises consistently with all of his other attributes. God is a God not only of sovereignty but he's a God of holiness and a God of justice so that what he does and the way that he directs events, it's always right. He always does the right thing and we may not see in time how the process is leading to that outcome, God is always working all things after the counsel of his will and as a result of that we can know that there are always holy purposes at work in whatever is happening in the world around us or in our personal lives, and even when men afflict us and afflict us unrighteously, we can know that they are simply pawns in the hand of God who is doing a greater good work to accomplish his purposes for his glory and for our good. That is an unalterable fact of the universe and it is only we as Christians who get to live in light of that kind of certainty and confidence because it's what has been revealed to us in his word and it's what God has given to us, to his people that we would know these things and that we would live in light of them. And my friends, as I've tried to emphasize over the past few months from the pulpit and also in some of our personal conversations and counsel, this means that we get to live differently. This means that we have the opportunity to live in peace, to live in contentment, that we do not have to live in a sense of constant agitation, that we don't have to try to manipulate the world around us to conform it and to bend it to our will because we understand that God's will is going to be carried out and as we trust him, as we remember him, as we rely on him, then we have the privilege of living life from a position of confidence, and another word which we will get to in due time in the book of Philippians in a life of contentment, the Apostle Paul said, "I have learned in whatsoever things that I am therewith to be content."

Let's look at that before we turn to 1 John, let's look at that verse in Philippians 4:11 where the Apostle Paul says this, Philippians 4:11 he says,

11 Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having

abundance and suffering need. 13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

And the strength of which he speaks and the ability to do all things of which he writes there is the matter of living in contentment regardless of his surrounding circumstances, and I realize that these are in so many diverse ways challenging days in which we live, for some of us personally and others just the social context of life, but what we must see and understand is that God has set before us in the provisions of his grace, his all-sufficient grace, he has given us that which enables us to live from a perspective of contentment rather than dissatisfaction; to live life in a position of obedience rather than sin; to live from a position of confident expectation about what the future will bring because it's in God's hands rather than a sense of fear and distrust and worry and anxiety over what life holds in store for us. You see, we are in the hands of a sovereign God who is holy and who is sufficient.

Look at 2 Corinthians 12 with me here as we're just kind of introducing things. 2 Corinthians 12, and let me just remind you of these things that you all know already so very well. 2 Corinthians 12:9, the Apostle Paul who was being afflicted by a messenger of Satan had prayed three times that the Lord would help him, that the thorn in his flesh would leave him he says in verse 8. And what was God's response to him? He said in verse 9,

9 He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." [Paul says] Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

And here's this word for contentment again. Paul says in verse 10,

10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

And you see, my friends, you see this theme of Paul's contentment being expressed. He says, "I can live in humble means, I can live in prosperity." He says here, "If Christ is with me in sufficient grace, even in my weaknesses, even in my difficulties," he says, "I'm content there because I derive my contentment not from the social circumstances around me, not from the condition of my personal life, I derive my contentment vertically. I have an unalterable, unchangeable position of grace and sufficiency that God has brought me to in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that is of surpassing value to the things of this earth," he says, "and because I have this, because it is unchanging, because it is sufficient, I have everything that I need and therefore I am content with what I have. I am content with the way that the Lord has made me. I am content with the way that the Lord has orchestrated my circumstances. I am content with whatever is happening in the world around me."

How can a man speak that way? How can a man speak from that kind of perspective in the midst of all kinds of social agitation? I mean, after all, Paul was beaten and dragged into prison, he lived in the midst of shipwrecks and spent days and nights in the sea he says in the book of Acts, how can this be? Is this real or is this just fantasy that is laid before us in the word of God? Is this just a taunt from falsehood that makes us long for something that we could never know in our own personal experience? Is that God's word? Is that what we respond to? Is that what we believe? Or is this the truth, is this the truth and we actually do have a God who is working all things together for us for good? Or is this the truth and we actually can be content in the midst of the life that the Lord has given us even if it is different from the life that we originally wanted, or it's different from the life of what we see in the people around us, or we see the life that we have and we like possibly being threatened by changes all around? My friends, is this true and is this contentment the expected nature of Christian living or is it a myth and we are all wasting our time here? The issues are no less stark than that.

Well, we gather together today corporately in the name of Christ and corporately, you know what, we believe these things to be true. We are convinced by the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts that God's word is true and that he is faithful to his people, and that he is sovereign over everything that happens and that he does all things with wisdom in such a way that we can trust him even in the midst of great uncertainty. You know, you and I, we're alike. You know, we've come to those moments, those forks in the road, those times in life where we honestly have no idea what to do next. What is the right thing to do here? What would be wise? It seems like wisdom is hidden from us even. And in those times, beloved, it is all the more crucial for us to come back to what we know to be true from God's word, that even if we don't understand and we don't see the plan, God does. We don't have to know what the future holds, it's enough to know who holds the future and the one who holds the future is our God in the Lord Jesus Christ. If God has saved you, if the Spirit of God has worked in your heart and brought you to saving faith in Christ and you have been born again, then all of these riches of which I speak are yours in abundance. All of these things belong to you equally as much as they do to me and we have the privilege of living life in response to them, and one of the consequences of that is that it shapes what our priorities are. It shapes what we think is important. It's what we give our time to as a result of these things.

So my friends, I invite you to believe God's word, I call you to believe God's word, I call you to recognize the wonder of the sufficiency that he has given to us in Christ, and to understand that that means that there is a life of contentment that is laid out before us in a way that we would be wise and we would do well to embrace and to seek after. And as we see these things and we all recognize, "You know what? What's described, what you're describing here, preacher, is rather distinct from my personal experience of it. I believe in Christ and I know the Spirit of God dwells within me, I'm confident of these things but there's a gap between what Scripture describes here in contentment and what I know in my own personal experience in my heart affections." Well, let me just encourage you, we're all in that boat and to just realize that this is a time for us, then, to draw near to God, to realize that we set aside our perceptions of life, we set aside our perceptions of what is happening, we realize that we don't understand. You know, who could understand

the fullness of all that's unfolding around us? You don't have to know that, my friends, in order to know this peace and contentment of which Christ speaks. You simply have to seek God in his word and to know God is to know the answers to these various kinds of affliction.

Well, that all in one way or another, that all leads us into our text for this morning from 1 John 4 because there's another aspect of the essence of God, the character of God that gives us direction and gives us confidence as we speak about these things. Yes, God is sovereign. Yes, God is righteous. That gives us a great position of comfort and strength as we look to the future but there's a whole other dimension to it that is the sweetest nectar of the fruit that we could drink from, that which gives the refreshing balm to our souls as we drink it in and as we contemplate what the word of God says about the nature of God, and in the greatness of this passage that the Lord in his providence has brought us to, we have the opportunity to focus on his love for us, is that the God who is sovereign, the God who is righteous, the God who is just, this is the same God who loves us, the God who is favorably disposed toward us, the God who seeks our well-being, the God who would never allow us to be separated from him in Christ, and all of these things, all of these come together in a wonderful cascade of a dynamic waterfall to give us a resounding picture of how wonderful our position is in Christ, and how perfect it is for you to be in Christ and to know him in this way.

So there are just multiple ways that we find our peace and our rest and our contentment and, my friends, I'm just going to be really direct and candid with you here, if there's a sense in your life that you are agitated and discontent, you need to come back here. The answer is here in this sovereign, righteous, loving God who is over all and who has our best interest in mind. How could it possibly go bad for us in the end in light of that, I ask you? If God is who he is and he has saved you and brought you to Christ, how could anything ultimately go wrong in the end? And if nothing can go wrong in the end, then how can we be anything other than at peace and content come what may?

I may have already alluded to this, keep your finger in 1 John but I just want to go back to Psalm 46. There's all kinds of Scripture rushing to my mind as we consider these things but Psalm 46, it's a great privilege for me to simply be able to remind you of who your God is. That's all I'm doing here this morning. Psalm 46:1 and 2,

1 God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. 2
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change And though the
mountains slip into the heart of the sea; 3 Though its waters roar and
foam, Though the mountains quake at its swelling pride.

Look at verse 8. What a great passage in the midst of times of social unrest.

8 Come, behold the works of the LORD, Who has wrought desolations in
the earth. 9 He makes wars to cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the
bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariots with fire.

And now again in another passage of Scripture, you see this contentment and this peacefulness of which we have been speaking here this morning as the word of God tells us,

10 "Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

How can we cease striving? On what basis do we find contentment and peace? Verse 11, he had already said it in verse 7,

11 The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our stronghold.

So this sovereign God, this just God, this loving God is with us and he is with us to bless us, to keep us, to deliver us to the ultimate outcome that he appointed for us before the beginning of time. My Christian friend, you will be with Christ in the end. We will be with him in glory. We will be at that great banquet feast of the Lamb. We will be with him and when all of the tears have been cried and they have all been wiped away, when all of the sorrows of this life are over and they are resolved by Christ when we are with him in heaven, when all of the uncertainty about what the course of our loved ones is going to be and those for whom we have prayed and we find our prayers unanswered, when all of it reaches its combination, you will find that this God of whom we've been speaking, this sovereign, just God of love toward his people will have fulfilled every promise to you without fail. There is no possibility that when we see the outcome of everything and when we see Christ face-to-face and we are changed to be like him by the sight of his presence, my friends, there is no possibility whatsoever anywhere in the universe nor has there ever been any possibility of this, there is no possibility that you will be disappointed in the end. There is no possibility that you will say, "It was less than what I expected." What the outcome is going to be, what the outcome is going to be is that we are going to see how small our faith was in comparison to how abundantly God proved his faithfulness to everything that he promised to his people in his word, and that every purpose that Christ, for which Christ came has been completely fulfilled, and you will find in the end, you will find that there has been an exquisite manifestation of perfect love from God to you in a way that transcends anything that we could see right now. And that, my friend, is how you must view the tribulations and the difficulties of life right now, you view them from the perspective of what the outcome will certainly be, you reach into the future as I've said in the past, you reach into the future and you pull that perspective into today and you view everything from that perspective and all of a sudden life has changed before your very eyes without a single circumstance having been adjusted. Not one aspect of who you are or what your circumstances are or what the world is around us or what the future may hold, not one bit of that has to change in order for you to know this kind of contentment. Contentment is found not in our circumstances but in knowing who our God is. And who is he? He is a God of sovereignty and therefore we trust him. He's a God of wisdom and therefore we depend upon him. And he is a God of love and therefore we find contentment in our souls.

So now with all of those things said let's look at chapter 4, verse 7. That was a whole message in itself. 1 John 4:7, we get the privilege of emphasizing the love of God in what's in front of us now. 1 John 4:7,

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. 10 In this 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 also ought to love one another. 12 No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.

This passage is teaching us about God-centered love. Its focus is on relationships within the body of Christ but that horizontal dimension of love is rooted in the vertical reality of the Triune nature of the love of God for his people, the Triune nature of the love of God for his people. There is one God who eternally exists in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and these three are coequal, they're equally deserving of worship but these three are all one God, and what we find here is that each person of the Trinity has been involved in expressing the love of God to us. The love of God is not some vague abstract concept, it is manifested to us and revealed to us in clear and compelling ways and the way that it has been revealed to us leads us to no other possible conclusion than he is a God of great love for his people, that it manifests from the very center of his Triune essence, and has been expressed to us throughout all of eternity so that as we live in the moment of time, as we live in these moments of time that we find ourselves in, each moment of time is connected, is rooted in this greater eternal love that God has for us.

I want you to, I don't give a lot of statistics about the text when I preach but sometimes it's important to see and to know. You should know this, is that God is in this passage that I just read in these five verses or six verses, in these six verses God is referred to either explicitly or by pronoun at least 17 times. This is a God-centered passage that we are looking at today, and then there is another measure of perspective that I want to share with you on it as well. The Greek word for "love" in this passage appears 15 times. Fifteen times in just six verses the concept of love is expressed. Seventeen times it's the person of God and Christ are being referred to. So there is this overwhelming emphasis that is given to us on the love of God and God's love for us is the source of our love for one another and, my friends, God's love for you is the source of your contentment in life.

So let's look at this passage from a three-part perspective here. First of all, we'll put it this way in our first point for this morning. We've titled today's message "Love One Another," and in point 1 we see this, is that we love in response to God's nature. We love in response God's nature. The first ground for love within the body of Christ comes from God's eternal nature. And verse 7,

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

Notice at the start the tender way that this passage is introduced to us. John had just been talking about the whole concept of discernment in those prior six verses that we looked at on Tuesday but now he shifts and rather than talking about discerning false teachers, he is now speaking within the family, as it were, and he never loses this pastoral tenderness, this pastoral kindness with which he speaks throughout the entire book of 1 John as he addresses them and says, "Beloved," and then he exhorts them, he puts his arm around them, as it were, and says, "let us love one another," and his point here as he goes on he says, "for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." Here again we see him referring to the doctrine of regeneration. A Christian is not somebody who has made a new moral effort in his life, a Christian is somebody who has been supernaturally born again from above. God has done a work in the heart of a Christian and as a result of that work, you and I now partake of the divine nature as the Apostle Peter says in his letters.

So because God is this God of great love, then what that means is within the body of Christ, that we should love one another and why do we love one another? It's not simply because it's the right thing to do, although it is, we love one another in response to the very character of God himself. This is so important to understand. It is a doctrine like this that we find here in 1 John 4 that will protect a church from all kinds of evil division and schism if we all understand that we come together having individually received the new birth from God and that this God who caused us to be born again has planted his loving nature in us, and as a result of that we are careful to manifest and cultivate love, not division, with one another. It is our divine responsibility to do this because we are responding to the character of God here, not simply seeking what we want according to our own individual preferences.

Beloved, speaking corporately, speaking to Christians, I understand that there are unbelievers in our midst here this morning but speaking corporately as Christians we understand this, is that God planted new life in your soul at the moment of your conversion. When you were born again, God changed your nature, God gave you new life, the old things have passed away, behold new things have come, and that old carnal man of hostility toward God, a lover of sin as you were and one who was hostile and angry toward others, that nature has been replaced. God took away that stony heart in your conversion and replaced and put in a new life, a new nature that corresponds to the nature of what he himself is like, and one of the central aspects of that new nature that God places in Christians is his nature of love. This nature of self-giving, of sacrificial concern for others, of the things that we will see in Christ here in just a moment, but just starting in this most overview sense, understand this, is that when God saved you, he put a life that is like his inside you and because he by nature is love, then the life that he put within you carries that same seed of love that he has been manifesting perfectly and is at the very core of his essence from all of eternity.

So the new life that you received from Christ has within it this seed of the love of the God who gave it to you. This is true of every Christian. This is supernatural. There is something new that is within you that vibrates, that pulsates with the love of the God who saved you. And what does that mean and what does it have to do with you within the body of Christ here today? Well, it means that true love for other Christians is inevitable. This must come out. This must manifest itself in the lives of Christians. It's inevitable because it's the nature of God to love his people and if you are partaking of the nature of God, then you will by nature love his people as well. That's why in part it was so sweet for you to come back together today, why you were so filled with joy as you saw fellow believers again, it's because finally after having been repressed for the past three months you have opportunity to see and express it again in the context of corporate worship.

Look at verse 7 here, he says, "everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." And knows God. We worship a God that we know. We're not like the pagans in the book of Acts who erected an altar to the unknown God and we worship blindly that which we cannot, that we do not see, that we do not know, that we do not understand. No, we know God. We understand him through his word. We understand him through the Spirit who now indwells us. We understand him as we contemplate the cross of Christ and we see Christ laying down, as it were, his life on our behalf. We see and we know these things, they've been imparted to us by the Spirit of God, and we now understand who God is in a way that we never did as those who were dead in trespasses and sins. We perceive him in the world around us. We grasp something of his character and we see the magnificence of his concern for others by what he has done for us in Christ, and in the fact that he extends the invitation to come to Christ to everyone who would hear and believe. And even those of you that have manifested the hardest, coldest, stoniest aspects of rebellion against God and his word, God patiently overlooks all of that and calls you to come to Christ that you might enter into life. What an amazing grace.

John's point here is that since God is love like that, then we ought to love one another and he drives it home through a negative contrast as you continue in the text. Verse 8, he says, he says,

8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

So to the extent that this is absent from your life, to the extent that a man or a woman finds himself or herself with no concern for the people of God, with no genuine interest in the welfare of the church of Christ, this is evidence that someone like that does not know God at all whatever else they may say with their mouth because it cannot be any other way. And notice, notice the absolute terms in which John expresses this, verse 7, "everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God for God is love." He is painted in exclusive terms. He has set up exclusive non-overlapping groups, either you know God and you love his people or you don't. You can't know God and love him and be absent and devoid of any love for his people. So a Christian loves like God loves.

Well, we might ask what does that love look like? Look over at 1 Corinthians 13, that great love passage. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. What is love? Let's forget about the sentiment. Let's forget about the false views of love. Let's forget about the concept of sensual lust. Forget about feelings and look at what the character of true love actually is. Verse 4,

4 Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never fails

My friends, and how important and how timely for us to be able to speak these words in contrast to a time of riots and social unrest that we find all around us in recent days. That is not love. The riots are not an act of the love of God because that is unbecoming, that is self-seeking. I'm talking about the riots in particular, the violence of it all. The provocation and the demand of the wrongs against me in my past must be taken into account. Beloved, look at the world around you and look at this passage and weigh things out in discernment about what is true and what is love and what is not. Love does not take into account a wrong suffered. Love does not act unbecomingly. I rather think that the violence and riots and killings and destruction of property, none of that can be found in this passage and that should affect the way that you and I discern the world around us and the way that we let it influence our perspective on what lies ahead.

But the more immediate context both in 1 Corinthians and in 1 John is the context of love within the body of Christ. What does that look like? Well, bringing this from the social realm outside to the realm of our life here together and the way that we interact even on social media and things that have been said in recent weeks and months, let me just say in a positive way that love shows itself in patient kindness and generosity; that love seeks the good of the other person; that love bears with wrongs suffered; and if love can bear with wrongs suffered, my friends, speaking within this room and those of you in our church that are watching over the live stream, if love does not take into account a wrong suffered, surely as many of you have manifested, surely love can make room and accommodation for someone who has a different opinion about a secondary matter than you do and not make that a point of division or exclusion. These things ought not to be. This is not the way we love one another is by creating divisions in things that are said over secondary matters.

Yeah, I paused to let that sink in a bit. The things that we say on social media, the things that we say to one another, the attitudes that we adopt toward one another, you should never view any of that, you should not put a keystroke on social media without filtering it through first this concept of love for one another and letting it affect everything that you do. Love shows itself in patient kindness. Love shows itself in generosity. Love seeks the good of the other person. Love expresses itself in self-sacrifice and in humble self-denial.

Look, look, we just have to view the world and our lives through this lens and through this perspective and not take our cues from the political realm which is designed to

agitate and create conflict and division and let that secular mindset drive the way that we respond to life and the way we respond to one another. That isn't right. That's sinful. And if we keep in mind, if we keep in mind the sovereign, wise, loving nature of God and we see that the life that he has planted in us is a reflection of, is to reflect and contains within it the seed of his love, then it could be no other way, so that our volatility and our anger and our dissatisfaction and our impatience with others who see the world differently than we do, the thermostat is lowered greatly on that in light of what God has done for you and your sinful soul. We must see life this way. Love does not retaliate. Love is based on truth. And what John is teaching us here as we go back to 1 John 4 is this, is that a man or a woman who does not love other Christians is a man or a woman who does not share God's nature. He does not belong to God. A man without this kind of love is still a child of Satan.

So the whole point, the whole point of all of this, I'm not concerned to try to sort out the things of the world and social issues here this morning, you know, Jesus said let the dead bury the dead. We're talking about within the church here this morning and what we find in this passage is that God's love for us is manifested within the course of relationships within the church and so that changes the way that we interact and what I want you to see is that John's argument, the things that he is saying here, his exhortation, it's rooted in the very essence of God. Look at verse 8, "The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love." "John, how can you make such an absolute statement, that everyone who loves is born of God and the one who doesn't, doesn't know God? How can you be so absolute in your statements here?" Well, he explains it in the simplicity of that supporting clause, "for God is love." If you know God, loving will manifest itself. If you're not manifesting love, then it's obvious what the problem is.

God is light, 1 John 1:5. God is love, 1 John 4:8. You see, it's not merely that God performs acts of love, by essence he is love. He has always been love. He has always been this, you run out of words to express the essence of God, don't you? God has forever and always before the beginning of time, love has always marked who God is and before the creation of the world love was manifested between and among the three persons of the Trinity, and as he created the world, God manifested his love for the world and continued on doing so. It's always been this way and it is so important for us to put away our false views of God, those hidden recesses of your heart that are skeptical of what God is doing in your life, that are suspicious of his ways with you. "Well, if God really loved me, then why did this or that happen? Why did I get made this way if God really loves me? Why? Why? Why? Why?" And all of that reflecting a suspicious legalistic bent toward the person of God. We need to overturn and uproot all of that and cast it away and come to the fresh soil where love takes root and understand that by nature God is a loving God who is always good to his people without fail and without exception.

Now how can we know that? Point 2, we love in response to Christ's sacrifice. We love in response to Christ's sacrifice. God himself, God the Father by nature is love and now we see the second person of the Trinity brought to bear in verse 9 as John further explains the grounds of Christian love. Verse 9,

9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

Beloved, settle this in your mind, the supreme expression of God's love, you always go to the cross when you have any questions about what the nature of God's love is like. If you have any questions about the love of God for you, forget all of your circumstances, forget all of the world around you, forget all of that and go singularly back to the cross of Calvary, look at that bloodied Savior giving his life voluntarily for you and your sins that you might be reconciled to God, and put away any notion that God is anything other than the most gracious, loving God that he could possibly ever be. If Christ loved you while you were an enemy of God, if Christ helped you while you were helpless and hostile toward God, then how can we think anything other than the highest, loftiest thoughts about his goodness and his favor toward us? How could we think anything else than that this God is majestically perfectly good, kind and gracious toward us? And God showed his love by sending his Son, his only begotten Son, the one he uniquely loved.

Understand this, beloved, this is so important. Theology really matters at a juncture like this. God did not send an angel to redeem you. God did not create a proxy and send someone else to do the dirty work on his behalf. God in the person, in the second person of the eternal Trinity, God himself became a man. God himself came to earth from heaven. God himself came on a mission of love and redemption for you and your guilty soul. God himself in the person of Christ offered himself up as the propitiatory sacrifice, the sacrifice that satisfied the wrath of God against your sin. God himself in the person of Christ bore the curse for us when we did not deserve that, we deserve the exact opposite, we deserve judgment and Christ did that for us not in response to anything good that you had done, not for the sake of any foreseen faith that God thought that you would have and he rewards you based on what you were going to do. None of that. You were guilty, you were lost, you were hostile, you were an enemy of God and while you were like that, Christ was like this, on the cross, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing. My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" As all of the weight of the sins of his people were laid upon him and he bore the curse, he bore the stroke of God against us and against you, in utter isolation, in utter abandonment of the perfect fellowship that he had had with the Father suddenly in a way that we cannot comprehend, all of that taken away and he's utterly forsaken, he's utterly crushed for us, for you. You know, I don't know how some of you can sit and listen in cold hearts. I know most of you aren't. But that's what the love of God is like. That's how he loved us. The nature of God's love is seen in the nature of that sacrifice.

Look at verse 10. It says,

10 In this is love, not that we loved God, [let's get the idea of personal merit out of the equation] but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

What's the love of God like? It's like the cross and it's at God's initiative. He first loved us and love, my friends, for the unworthy is the measure of God's love.

Look at verse 11, he says,

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

If Christ loved you in self-sacrifice when you were even hostile and alienated from him, then that's the measure. How far does love in the church go? Even when someone has wronged you, you love them in the spirit of self-sacrifice, not taking the wrong into account, not holding it against them, manifesting love and sacrifice for the sake of others just like Christ did for you. Christ taught a parable, didn't he, about a servant who was forgiven a great debt by a king and wouldn't refuse a lesser debt that was owed to him by a fellow human. This matters to God. This is significant to God and this is what we are called to.

My friends, I'll just state it as simply here as I know how. You cannot receive Christ and afterwards live selfishly for yourself. You can't receive Christ and be reconciled to God and then refuse to be reconciled to others that are around you. You can't know a God who put away all of his legitimate charges against your account and then continue to bear grudges and resentment and hostility toward people for lesser wrongs that they have committed against you. Forgiveness is at the heart of redemption. Vertically God forgives our sins in Christ and therefore the call is that having been forgiven, we go and forgive likewise. Ephesians 4:32 says this. He says, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

This is open and shut. God in his nature is love, we love in response because that's the seed planted in us. Christ loved us, gave himself at the cross, we love in response to that sacrifice. And now we come to our third and final point in verse 12, we love in response to God's Spirit. We love in response to God's Spirit. Now if you're like me at a time like this you feel quite a bit of conviction. You realize that you fall short of that lofty standard that has taken place. You realize your words and your actions have fallen short, not even to mention the, you know, the sinful attitudes that you carry along in your heart. We all fall short of this, that's why we need a Savior. We understand that. What we find now as we come to verse 12 is this, is that God did not leave us to our own abilities to love like this.

Look at verse 12. He says in verse 12,

12 No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.

It is the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit alone that gives us the power to love like this. We can't see God with our physical eyes. We don't have the power in our natural abilities to love in this self-sacrificial matter. What we find instead is that God has provided even the power to do so, look at verse 12 there, God abides in us. The Spirit of God helps us to live this way as we depend on him, as we call upon him, and it is in that way that our love displays the reality of our salvation.

This God abiding is a reference to the Holy Spirit as we see in verse 13 that we'll cover next Sunday. Verse 13,

13 By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

And so verse 12, his love is perfected in us as the Spirit abides in us and produces that fruit within us, and here's the thing, my friends, as we kind of wrap this up and bring it all to a close, look at what he says here in the last half of verse 12, "if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us." In other words, the goal of God in your salvation is accomplished when you are loving other believers in the way that we have spoken about here, when you're responding in love and faith to the God of whom we've been speaking here today. God saved you – watch this – God saved you in part so that your life would manifest the love which prompted your salvation in the first place. Our circumstances are secondary to that greater goal of God to work out in our lives and each person of the Trinity is involved in producing that love. The Father is love. The Son in love died for us. The Spirit in love indwells us and empowers us to love this way. The fullness of the Triune Godhead is at work in the things of which we've spoken here this morning.

So let me just ask you a question as we close here. Has life brought to you trials that have exposed your weakness? That have made you falter and stumble along the way? Does adversity threaten to swallow you up whole as the fish swallowed Jonah whole? Beloved, come back to the God of whom we've spoken today, this God who is sovereign, this God who is wise, this God who is love. Remember that in Triune love God has saved you and so the purposes of your adversity could only be good in the end. Trust him and as you're trusting him, remember to manifest this love to one another.

Let's pray together.

O Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we thank You for Your love for our souls. You are sovereign and therefore we trust You. You are wise and therefore we depend upon You. You are love and therefore we seek to love one another. Help us to all of these ends and may You take the vast things of which we've spoken today, apply them according to the need of each heart that You might be glorified in our lives and that Your love would be perfected in us even as we love one another. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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