

Sermon 39, Love One Another, 1 John 4:11-12

Proposition: God's love teaches us to love one another.

- I. Who You Are: Beloved, v. 11a
- II. What You Are: Loved, v. 11b
- III. What You Should Do: Love Each Other, v. 11c
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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, John has already given us his message of love several times. But the gospel logic of this particular statement of it is just breathtaking. God is love; God loved us in a particular way, by sending His only Son as a wrath-removing sacrifice. And that love is explicitly held up as our model, our example, the difference-maker in our lives too. The attitude that's in the leader is going to be in the people. And the attitude in our God is one that we not only should imitate, but one that we want to imitate. Even though at times our sinful hearts don't want to imitate it, every child of God wants to want to be like this. The love of God is amazing. It is magnificent. Even if you have heard the good news your whole life, you can't help but be overwhelmed afresh as you contemplate the truth that God gave His Son for you. Brothers and sisters, not only do you and I want to be loving like God is; we ought to want it. It resonates at the very deepest level with our nature as created and as redeemed. And no matter how rebellious someone is being, this demonstration of love is going to affect that person in a profound way. It may not convert him. But it will hit him. Remember that Roman centurion who said "Surely this was the Son of God"?

God's love teaches us to love one another.

I. Who You Are: Beloved, v. 11a

So once again, in case you forgot, look around the room at your brothers and sisters. Listen to the leader up front. What's that he's calling you? Oh, yes: "Beloved." That's the official word, the canonical word from the canonized leader who founded our organization and whose spirit we hold dear. I'm talking about the apostle John, of course. But do you know whose Spirit was on him? Why, yes, the Spirit of our Lord Jesus.

No one has seen God. But I trust that you felt His love the moment you walked in here. I did. I know that some of you feel it because you've told me. Others have shown it by their actions, by the looks on their faces, by certain tones of voice and shades of attitude. We are beloved to each other because we are beloved to our leaders and to the one Lord who called us

all together. Who are you, brothers and sisters? You are beloved. That is your identity. Why does John lean so hard on identity throughout this letter, emphasizing over and over your origin as children of God? Because who you are matters. It defines what you will do. You are beloved, and from that place of love and acceptance you are positioned to offer love and acceptance to those around you.

So your title is “beloved.” That’s what I call you at the beginning of every sermon, and that’s what the apostle John calls you, and that’s what Jesus calls you.

II. What You Are: Loved, v. 11b

But beloved is not just your name and status. John repeats it so I’m going to repeat it too: You are loved by God Himself. The form of the sentence is conditional: “If God so loved us.” But John just asserted in the previous verse that God *did* love us. Since God loved us, we ought to love one another.

You are loved to the point that Jesus died for you, that God gave His Son for you. He didn’t merely feel good about you; He acted to save you.

This means that your daddy issues don’t define you. The lack of love and justice you experienced from your family, from your friends, from society or school or employer — none of that defines you. The most salient fact about you is that God loves you, and He took the ultimate step of giving His Son to save you from your sin. We can’t skip over this or minimize it. In fact, this is the gospel: God loved us and therefore took action to save us.

III. What You Should Do: Love Each Other, v. 11c

But from this gospel flows the imperative that we love each other! John has talked about this a lot. He specifically put it in terms of deed and truth in the previous chapter — or what I called “laying down your wallet.”

How do we love each other? Again, love is an action. To love each other is to do things for each other. It’s not primarily about feeling a certain way, though love at a minimum does require that you want what’s best for the other person. But you must go beyond that and love like Jesus did, by laying down your life and your wallet.

We’ve talked about this in terms of hospitality. We’ve talked about it in terms of the five love languages. We’ve talked about it in terms of gifts and cards. We’ve talked about in terms of “When was the last time you expressed one of the five love languages to someone in this church”? Brothers and sisters, we must love each. That means no fighting each other. No gossiping about each other. It means allowing the other members of this church to follow their conscience, even when you think they’re totally wrong.

So spend quality time with each other. Give gifts. Perform acts of service. Give a hug or a handshake. Speak encouraging words. If God so loved you, by giving the ultimate gift that was also an act of service and a physical touch and quality time with the human race, you can and must love one another.

IV. Why You Should Do It, v. 12

But John doesn’t stop there. He not only gives one reason — God’s love — but three more.

A. It's the Way to See God, v. 12a

Why does he repeat this comment from his gospel, that no one has seen God at any time? Because though Christ perfectly showed what God is like, we too show what He is like when we love one another. How do you see God? Go to church and watch them love one another. This seems hard to believe — but it's true. God is revealed through our love for one another. How can God be revealed through something so imperfect? Well, John addresses that too, by saying that when we love each other properly that's actually when God's love comes to perfection.

Let me put it this way: Do you believe in God's love more when you see His people caring for each other, opening their wallets, hearts, and homes to one another — or when you see His people engaging in vitriolic arguments, abuse, and neglect of one another? The answer is obvious. One of the commentators pointed out that in the western world, atheism was almost unknown until the 16th century. It only really took off after the church was divided and Christians started killing each other. Folks, when we hate and kill other Christians, that hides God's love from a lot of people, including ourselves. And remember again, as I've repeated over and over to you: Love is an action and therefore there is no passive loving. If you aren't actively loving, you're hating.

God is invisible. But His love is made visible in our love for one another. What have you done to show God's love this week?

B. It's the Result of God's Abiding in Us, v. 12b

But how, exactly, do we perform these deeds of love? Only through the power of God abiding in us. If He doesn't live in you, you'll never be able to love one another. If loving people like the so-and-so's sounds impossible to you, that's okay. It is. Only the Spirit whose fruit is love can teach you to love people like the ones in this church, can teach you to love people like the ones in this city, can teach you to love people like me.

John puts it backwards here. He mentions our love first and God's abiding second. Later on, of course, he will make it clear that it's not that God comes to us and abides in us after we begin to love correctly. V. 19 assures us that He first loved us. Because He loved us, changing our identity and making us beloveds, we can now abide in His love by loving one another. Again, we don't love one another to get in. We don't love one another to stay in. We love one another because we're in. And God is in us. We are in His church, part of His body — and He is in us.

Notice, then, that His abiding is corporate. We're going to talk about this next week. Yes, Jesus lives in us individually. But He is present in a more perfect way in the group setting. He is in me, but more profoundly, He is in us. That's why John uses this plural language all through our passage. If you love one another, you're loving Jesus, as He so clearly taught.

My mom always described loving one another like this: Don't ask "What would Jesus do?" Ask "What would I do for Jesus?" How would Jesus handle a screaming baby brother? Don't try to answer that question. Instead, ask yourself how you would treat that screaming baby brother if he were Jesus. How would you treat that problem church member if he were Jesus? How would you care for violent protesters if they were Jesus? You see, because Jesus is abiding

in *us*, to do things and show love to your brothers and sisters really is a way of showing your love to your Savior.

C. It's How God's Love Comes to Perfection, v. 12c

In fact, John goes on to make this astonishing claim that when we love each other, that act brings God's love to perfection. Now, was God's love imperfect before? Of course not. But His love is fulfilled when it creates lovers. Love wants what's best for the other person, and what's best for us is to love. We were made for it, made to do it. When God's love transforms us from haters into lovers, it is fulfilled. It is satisfied. We know that unrequited love is a sad and painful experience. But when God's love awakens our hearts to love Him back, then He and we are perfectly united in love. His love has been made complete.

Do you want that for this church? For every church? For the whole world? Then keep showing love to one another, and so fulfill the love of God. He gave His Son for you. Give your hearts to each other. Amen.