

Walking in the Light – Part 10
God's Love Made Complete – 1 John 4:7-12
Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – November 10, 2024

Intro:

- When I was in college in the early nineties, the headquarters for the Billy Graham Association was located in Minneapolis, not too far from my campus. When they needed people to answer the phones for responses from a crusade, they would recruit volunteers from the area including students from the local Christian colleges. A number of my classmates and I volunteered to answer the phones. We spent a day being trained and were each given a quick reference handbook with all types of questions and answers so we could easily turn to them as we talked and prayed with those who called.
- On crusade days, we would head on down to the headquarters and find our place in the phone bank and wait with manual in hand to wait for the little light bulb on our phone to light up indicating we had a call. We spent hours on those phones never knowing who would be on the other line when we picked up.
- I think that around 2 out of every 3 calls were ones where the person on the phone was looking for assurance of salvation. This was a very common question then, and it has been in my 30 years of pastoral experience, and I know you have asked the same questions yourselves, and rightly so. It also was a common question in the time of John the Apostle who wrote these three letters to the churches so that they would know that they had eternal life.

1 John 5:13 NIV

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

- John, in these letters, gives us many identifying characteristics that provide evidence of who we are. Some of the identifiers of those who have eternal life are: are you owning, confessing, and fighting against sin? Are you overcoming the evil one? Are you keeping God's commands? Do you believe in Christ, and are you abiding in Him? Do you love your brothers and sisters?
- John keeps drilling down on these, over and over and over again, giving more depth and clarity with each pass. In our passage for this morning, 1 John 4:7-12 (found on page 1056), John brings us back to the important topic of love as evidence for eternal life. In this passage, he unearths the source of love, which is God Himself, explains the expression of God's love in Jesus Christ, and describes how this love is made complete in the children of God.
- It is important for us to understand these things so we will know how we are to live as Christians in relationships. This passage helps us understand the nature of God and how His nature expressed itself through Jesus the Christ.
- In these first verses of our passage this morning, John tells us that the source of love is God Himself -because God is love.

The source of love: God Himself

1 John 4:7-8 NIV

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

- Again, in this passage along with previous parts of this letter, we are told to love one another, and the reason that we are to do so is that “love comes from God.” The logic flows that everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. This means that if you have been born of God – that is, “born again” as a child of God, you are of your Father’s nature, and because of this you are to love your brothers and sisters. And if you love, you know God. So, our love for each other is evidence that we are God’s children and that we have eternal life.
- This love for our brothers and sisters takes on many forms - from helping people move, to providing financial assistance and encouragement, to praying for each other, to providing a listening ear or a warm hug, from celebrating their victories or crying alongside them, expressing kindness, telling each other the truth we need to hear, extending understanding and just “showing up” in each other’s lives.
- Now, in contrast, whoever does not love does not know God. This means that a lack of love for others is evidence that a person does not know God. These even may be people who say they are Christians but don’t have any interest in being involved in other Christian’s lives. No fellowship, no prayer, no worship, no service, no generosity.
- And then John states a significant and deep theological truth that “God is love.” So, we need to spend some time unpacking what this means.
- First, the statement “God is love” does not mean “love is God” because not all love is God-like, nor is all love “equal.” God is love, but love is not God. *Love doesn’t define God, God defines love.* Since God is love, all our definitions of what love is and how it behaves must be drawn from Him – by who He is and what He does.
- Second, God cannot fall in love; He is love. God cannot fall in love for the same reason water can’t get wet: it is wet. God is love-in-eternal-action, and He defines love. We know what love is because of who He is. And we know who He is through what He has created, through what He has written and through His Son; through all the ways He has extended His love to people—especially in giving us the gospel!
- Third, when John says, “God is love,” this definition means way more than “God loves us.” This is true about God, along with “God sustains us, God forgives us, God rules us, and God judges us,” etc.. This is not a definition of what He does but what He is. C. H Dodd says it this way: “God is love implies that all His activity is loving activity, even His judgment. If He creates, He creates in love; if He rules, He rules in love; if He judges, He judges in love. All that He does is to the expression of His nature, which is to love.”
- As humans, we do not have the right nor the power to define what love is; only God has that right and the power to define what it is based on who He is. If you want to understand love, then you must understand love by who God is and through what God says and what God does because everything He does is because of His nature, which is love. Even His anger and His wrath are expressions of His love. All of these come from His love because He is love and only does what is loving. People don’t get to define what a loving God is or does. “A loving God wouldn’t allow this sickness.... crime... etc.” We are in no position to do that because we don’t know everything there is to know, but we just know in part and must trust Him and His plan and know that He is love and that we will understand in the fullness of time.

The expression of love: Jesus Christ

1 John 4:9-10 NIV

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

- For love to be love, it must be shown, expressed, or demonstrated through actions and in truth (1 John 3:18). If there is a father who says he loves his daughter but who has never done one loving thing: not available for her, not paying attention to her, not providing for her, not treating her well. We don't believe his profession that he loves her. We can only understand what love is by experiencing it through actions. And here is the action that defines love. Love is expressed by giving what is precious and unique of itself so that others may have life. God took the initiative to express His nature by giving His unique Son so the world would live because of Him and His gift to us. So, love is giving of ourselves for the benefit of others.
- And this giving of ourselves is not self-serving to get something in return, nor is it in response to the love of others that has been shown to us. This is not love as God defines it. God's love is expressed by the giving of the Son so that we can live through Him. God loved us not because we were lovable or because we loved Him but because of who He is.
- He demonstrated His love by becoming the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Atoning means to pay the penalty for a trespass, which is called sin, which is any act or acts that are not in alignment with God's love as defined in His commands like the Ten Commandments and others.
- Why did God need to send His Son to atone for the sins of His creatures? Could He just have forgiven everyone of everything and not have to go through all that? Would not that have been "loving?" No, just to forgive everyone their sin would not be loving. It would not be loving to all those who have been violated by sin, including Himself. Love is also just. And to be loving is also to be just. So God, because of who He is, must hold people accountable for their acts that are against His nature and His commands that were formed and founded in His love. There must be a penalty for sin because God is love.
- So, to express His nature, God sent His Son to pay the penalty of our sins against Him and others, making a way for all people to be forgiven of their sins. There is and always will be a price to pay for sin because of God who is love and requires it because love requires it, because justice is an element of love. Not addressing sin would be unloving. Love has to deal with sin, and there is sin because of the trespass of love.
- So, not holding people accountable for their sins is not loving. It is not loving of God, or others, or to the person who committed the sin. People often mistakenly don't deal with sin and bend God's standards and call it love. Do not confuse love with enablement or acceptance. We must deal with sin because of love. To not do so is not love and is not of God.
- Love deals with sin and looks for reconciliation and relationships made right. Being loving to others is keeping them accountable to God's standards and offering forgiveness for their repentance. And, by the way, forgiveness does not take away consequences for sin. Remember, God disciplines those He loves (Heb. 12:6). It is not loving to let everyone do what they want to do without consequences.
- God's love was shown in the sending of His Son as a representative of His very nature, which is love. The same Jesus who forgave sinners and healed the blind and the lame is the same Jesus who rebuked the Pharisees and turned over tables. Jesus is the same one who is the suffering servant laying down His life for the sins of mankind, and the Lord of Lords who calls all the nations to account and who will "tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God" (Rev 19:15). All of this is done out of love.
- Again, you and I do not have the authority to define love; God defines love. And what God says it is - is what it is. And what God does is what love does. Anything that is outside His definition of love is not love. Any actions that He would not take are not love. Love is the sacrifice of self for the betterment of others. Now again, sometimes this love expresses itself by standing up for

what is true and right treatment, including justice for yourself. Love does not enable or condone sin but calls it to repentance and expresses itself through self-sacrificial goodness.

- The source of love is God Himself, and the expression of this love is through Jesus Christ. And now, God's children are to complete this love by loving one another.

The completion of love: His Children

1 John 4:11-12 NIV

Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

- Dear friends, since we are God's children, and since He is love and has so loved us, then of course we must show this by loving one another. If we are of His nature, then we must be motivated by love and express this love in our relationships with each other. It is the indisputable evidence that we are born again; born to be like Jesus. The proof of our faith is not that we say we're Christians but that, because we're born again, we love one another like Jesus does. Our love for Jesus must also come with our love for those he loves.
- No one has ever seen God the Father in all His glory. However, in our love for each other, God, who lives in us, people will get a glimpse of who He is through us. Because He lives in us, because He abides in us, and we love each other, then His love is made complete in us, finds its fulfillment, and reaches its final goal of love given to us and love given through us. This is where the love of God finds its completion.
- We love because God is love. We love because He first loved us. We don't engage with others to be loved; we engage with others because we are loved. We don't engage with others to be filled; we engage with others because we are filled. If we know God, we will love other people, as God defines love. And if we don't love other people as God defines love, then we don't know God and are not of God, and do not have eternal life.

Conclusion

- Do you know God as He has revealed Himself through what He has created, what He has written, and through His Son Jesus Christ? Do you know God for who He is, or have you created an idol of your own liking and called it God? Your opinion of what you think He should be has no effect on who He is. We must deal with God on His own terms to know Him for who He truly is. We are created in His image; He is not created in our image.
- We must come to God on His terms because He is who He is, and He is love. May God open all of our eyes to the reality of who He is. And in so doing, we will worship Him in spirit, and in truth, we will honor Him for who He is, and we will live our lives to glorify Him and enjoy His goodness forever.
- I am asking you to pray that God will show Himself to you. I am asking you to read His word and learn about who He is. I am asking you to receive the Son and follow Him and your Lord and, in so doing, do what He calls us to do, which is to believe in Him and love one another. There would be a true revival in our hearts, homes, and land if we did so.

Benediction

May the peace of Christ, who lives in you, guard your hearts and guide your steps today and always as you continue to know Him more and more and be shaped into His image. Amen.

Questions for Growth Groups

- **How does understanding that "God is love" shape the way you define and express love in your life?** What are some examples where God's definition of love differs from the world's?
- **Reflect on 1 John 4:9-10, where God's love is shown through sending His Son as an atoning sacrifice.** How does this example of sacrificial love challenge your view of what it means to love others?
- **John emphasizes that our love for others is evidence that we know God.** How do you see this evidence in your own life? Are there relationships where God is calling you to grow in love?
- **The sermon mentions that God's love includes justice and accountability.** How does this aspect of God's love influence the way you handle conflict, forgiveness, and reconciliation with others?
- **In what ways can love be misunderstood as enabling or condoning sin, and how does true love, as defined by God, differ?** How can we ensure our love for others aligns with God's truth?
- **How does the completion of God's love, as discussed in 1 John 4:11-12, find expression in community?** How can our growth group or church more fully embody God's love in practical ways?
- **The sermon challenges us to know God as He truly is, not as we might prefer Him to be.** Are there ways that your view of God has changed as you've learned more about His nature? How can we guard against forming a view of God based on our own desires or culture's opinions?