

- Good morning, please open your Bibles to 1Jn4
- Today in our continuing series on the attributes of God, we are going to talk about God's love.
- While it may seem fairly straightforward to talk about God's attributes, we soon find that they are not nice, tidy, little packages with clear defining lines between them.
- There is significant overlap and the lines can become quite blurry.
- For instance, is love distinct from goodness, grace, mercy, and long-suffering, or are goodness, grace, mercy, and long-suffering simply aspects or facets of love?
- While theologians have taken different approaches to describing God's love, they ultimately wander into the lane of these other attributes, even if they find them distinct.
- And what about those attributes that, to us, seem to conflict with one another, like love and justice?
- How does a Holy God, who is perfect in the full expression of all his attributes, reconcile his justice that demands punishment and love without compromising either?
- Fortunately, we realize that we don't have to have all the answers today; we will have all eternity to learn about the marvelous attributes of God.
- But today, let's dig into God's love a little more, and I will do my best to keep in my lane without trespassing on those who have preached and will preach in the weeks ahead.

**1Jn 4:7-12** Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. **8** Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. **9** 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. **10** In this is love, not that we have 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 ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

- Pray
- We are not going to have time this morning to fully explore God's love.
- Rather, through our passage, I want to highlight three key aspects: God's love is unconditional, God's love is sacrificial, and God's love is eternal.
- But before we dig into these, we need to clarify one point.
- At the end of verse 8, it says, "God is love."
- We need to be careful in extracting this from its context and turning it into THE defining attribute of God.
- John is not making a statement regarding God's love as his supreme attribute.
- If that is the case, we have to wrestle with John's statements that "God is light" (1Jn 1:5) and "God is Spirit" (Jn 4:24).
- There have been some poor teachings in the last couple of decades that reflect this idea that God is love reflects God's supreme or overarching attribute.
- In this teaching, everyone, even those who reject or despise God, will eventually be saved, and hell will be emptied because God's love reigns supreme over all his other attributes.
- It's a nice and comforting sentiment, and it would be convenient for fallen humanity if it were true, for God's love would triumph over his justice, and all sin would be overlooked.
- But to get there, those who teach this must through gymnastics with the Bible.
- Twisting the Scripture and its revelation of the perfect harmony of God's attributes.
- Later, we will touch on the meaning of "God is love" in its context. But for now, let's get into text.

### God's love is unconditional

- What do we mean by that?
- Well, unconditional simply means that there is not a condition for the basis of his love.
- His love is unmerited.
- His love is not based on anything good or worthy that we have done or anything good or worthy that we will do.
- It is not based on our gender, or our appearance. It is not based on our family relations or how much we give to the church or how much we serve him.
- Simply, in his will and for his pleasure, he chooses to love without respect to the “worthiness” to be loved of that which he sets his love upon.
- See this love is not the love that we talk about when we talk of family love, or brotherly love, or romantic love.
- It is not an emotional love, or our love of chocolate, or of the Packers, or the love that warm Christmas sentiment or pumpkin spice lattes in the Fall.
- It is an unconditional love of choice that is not based on a feeling or a sentiment and chooses regardless of the attitudes or actions of the one chosen to be loved.
- Where do we see this in the text? Look at verses 9-10

**1Jn4:9-10** 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. **10** In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

- God's unconditional love is made clear how?
- Well, we could say that God's love was revealed in the fact that Jesus came to earth. Jesus appeared – that he was sent and arrived was the manifestation of God's love.
- And while that is true, what John is actually highlighting is that God's love for us is revealed through the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross as the propitiation for our sins.
- He was sent that we might live through him by the salvation he provided in his death and resurrection.
- That act was the manifestation of God's love toward us.
- Can we not see the unconditionality of God's love here?
- From before eternity, God knew that his creation would reject him, would turn against him. And yet, he chose to love where there was no merit.
- Yes, there is a way in which God loves all the people in the world.
- We cannot escape verses such as Jn 3:16, “For God so loved the world,” which speak of his love for all of his creation.
- Or the end of Jonah, where God's love shows compassion for the lost people of Ninevah.
- How could he not? For his image, while thoroughly twisted and distorted in fallen humanity, remains within them.
- And in his loving goodness, even though they are unworthy, he provides, **Mt 5:45** “...*For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*”
- Yet, in his love, he also chose those whom he would call his own, who would be recipients of his love in a deeper way.

**Eph 1:4-5** ...even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love **5** he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,

- From eternity past, in love, he chose us to be in him and with him, knowing that there was nothing good in us worthy of love.
- He did not see a pre-disposition to accept him or love him or a pre-disposition to do good.
- The Bible is clear in Ro 3 we would never make that choice nor have ability to do any good without him.
- No, there is nothing from our end that merited the choice to love us. It was an unconditional choice of love.

**Ro 5:8** but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

- While we were still sinners. Born guilty, born with a sin nature. Having turned our backs on him, worthy only of judgment, mocking his holiness. Christ died for us.
- Why this choice? Why one and not the other?
- We can't answer that. It was simply God's good pleasure to choose who he wills to receive this deeper demonstration of his love in salvation.
- We should note here that it is also God's unconditional love that continues to love even when those loved, those who belong to Christ, continue to sin.
- Sin, that in his omniscience, he knew would occur even after he redeemed us.
- In this way, we see another aspect of his unconditional love: his long-suffering, his patience.
- Yes, we are disciplined as sons and daughters when we sin.
- But that, too, is God's unconditional love toward us as his discipline transforms us into the image of his Son.

### **God's love is Sacrificial**

**1Jn4:9-10** 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. **10** In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

- One general definition of God's love is that *God's love means that God eternally gives and shares of himself.*
- In our verses, we see that God gave of Himself; He gave His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.
- What does that mean? It means that Christ died on the Cross to satisfy or appease the wrath of God for our sins.
- In his love, Christ sacrificed Himself to appease God's wrath and pay the penalty for our sins.

**1Jn 3:16** By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us...

- And through this love, we become his children

**1Jn 3:1** See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

- And here we can start to see how God's perfect justice and perfect love are both perfectly satisfied without compromise.
- In his unconditional, sacrificial love, God himself takes the punishment for those who could not and would not do it themselves.
- And in so doing, God's justice is perfectly satisfied: his wrath is appeased as the punishment falls on His Son.
- And His perfect love is satisfied in that it has saved those whom he has chosen.

*Amazing love, how can it be, that though my God should die for me?*

- What this also highlights, is that God's sacrificial and giving love is a love of action.
- God's love acts. It acts for the good of the person loved. It is not a passive love.
- It acts for it must, and it acts in the best interests of the person loved. It acts in God giving of and sacrificing himself for the best interest of the one loved.
- While the sacrifice of His Son is perhaps the greatest example of His sacrificial love in action, this sacrificial and giving love that acts is also evident in everyday life.
- The fact that he brings the sunrise and sunset, and rain for the crops to grow.
- The fact that provides for our daily needs.
- Without God's loving provision, we have nothing. We are totally dependent on him for everything, and in his sacrificial love, he acts and provides. (even when we are so good about asking)
- And there is no way we can repay him beyond our thankful gratitude.
- Now, we may sometimes be tempted to question this: If God loves me by giving Himself sacrificially, then why don't I have healing, or why am I struggling financially, or why don't I have everything I think I need?
- Sometimes, God's act of sacrificial giving-of-himself love is the act of withholding.
- For, in God's wisdom, that is what he knows is ultimately in our best interest – and God knows what our best interest is much better than we do.

### **God's love is Everlasting**

**1Jn4:9-10** 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. **10** In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

- God's love is eternal - it is a love of total commitment – his love NEVER quits.
- We know from John 17 that love existed, perfect love, within the Trinity before the creation of the world – into eternity past.

**Jhn 17:24** Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

- And it was in the “before time” that we were chosen to be the special subject of God's unconditional, sacrificial, and eternal love

## 1 John 4:7-21 : The Love of God

- Look at 1Jn10 again – “not that we have loved God, but that he loved us.”
- God loved us - a past, snapshot action in which he set his love on us from before all time.
- He set his love on us before we were.
- And God is not fickle – he is unchanging – he doesn’t love one day and then change his mind the next.
- Once he has chosen to love (remember, this is not emotion), his love abides.
- He isn’t surprised by our faults and failings, he knew them before all time and yet, he chose to set his love on us.
- And he has promised that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Even our own sinful actions.

**Rom 8:38-39** For, I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, **39** nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- Now, this is clearly a reflection of God’s unconditional love of choice.
- But.... We might also recognize that the redeemed are in Christ and he is in them.
- When God looks at us, he sees His Son whom he has loved from eternity past and will love into eternity future.
- Yet perhaps Ps 103:17 says it best as a summary of God’s eternal love for those whom he has chosen:

**Ps 103:17** But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children,

- So, God’s love is unconditional – it is a love of choice, not emotion, and does not depend on the merit of the one being loved. It is a patient love, that continues to endure wrongs against it and seek the best interest of the one loved.
- God’s love is sacrificial – it is a love of action in which God gives of himself for the best interests of the one loved, and is most manifested in Christ dying on the cross for our sins.
- God’s love is eternal – it is a love that existed in eternity past, that chose to love us unconditionally in eternity past, and will remain for us and with us now and into eternity future.
- Yet, we can’t leave it at that. For we recognize that v9-10 actually serve not only to demonstrate and prove God’s love, but they also serve as a ground of justification.
- A ground of justification as to why we are to love one another.

**1Jn4:7-8, 11-12** Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. **8** Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love... **11** Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. **12** No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

- We call God’s love one of his communicable attributes. That means that as those made in him image, in some way that attribute is reflected in us.
- Yet, as is so abundantly evident in our world, the fall has warped, perverted, and muted our expression of this love.

- Rather than selfless, it is selfish. Rather than an unconditional choice, it is conditional, based on perceived merit and emotion. It rarely sacrifices and hesitantly acts.
  - And most often, it looks out for the best interest of self rather than others.
  - Yet, because we have been the recipients of God's special love, we are regenerated, our dead spirit made alive, and there is something different.
  - Our spirit made alive and our union with the Holy Spirit make it possible for us to begin loving with God's love as originally intended.
  - Through our cooperation, the Holy Spirit that now lives within us begins to unwarp and transform that image, allowing us to reflect this love.
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- In these verses, for the third time in this short letter, John is returning to this theme of love, urging us to love our brothers and sisters.
  - Yes, we are to love God with God's love, we are to love our enemies with God's love.
  - But here John's special focus is God's love demonstrated in the life of believers toward other believers in the family of God.
  - In v7-8 John when John says that "Love is from God" and "God is love" what he is saying is that it is in God's very nature to love.
  - That is the meaning in context.
  - Because it is God's very nature to love, those who love with God's love show that they have been born again – they have been regenerated, that they know God and they are known by him.
  - Simply by association, God's loving nature is going to be reflected by those who belong to him. We become like those we associate with.
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- Yet, someone who claims to be a believer and does not love his fellow believers with God's unconditional, sacrificial, and unending love does not know God.
  - If we can't love with God's love, those in whom Christ dwells, in whom we share unity through the Holy Spirit, how can we claim to belong to God?
  - Further, In John 13:34, Christ gives the commandment, "...love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.
  - And in **1Jn 5:3** "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments."
  - This tells us that if we don't love others as Christ loved us, we don't love God.
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- And so, we are to love each other unconditionally, sacrificially, and without end.
  - Now, let's get real for a moment. This type of love is not easy.
  - As Bilbo Baggins would say, "I don't know half of you half as well as I should like; and I like less than half of you half as well as you deserve."
  - It's easy to love those we like and get along well with.
  - But, there are probably people here you don't like very much and you don't feel like loving.
  - There are likely people here that have hurt you and, humanly speaking, you don't want to love them – they don't seem to merit your love.
  - And if not here, somewhere in the body of Christ. By the way, don't start looking around...
  - Yet God's love is not emotionally or merit-based. It loves by choice regardless of the merit or our feelings for that brother or sister. Regardless of how much we dislike or have been hurt by another believer.

## 1 John 4:7-21 : The Love of God

- Those sitting in the seats around us who know Christ, who have his Spirit within them, have been the recipients of his unmerited love as equally as us.
- And so in love for God, we must learn to set aside our fallen-ness and make a choice to love.
- Not in pride, as if we are taking the higher moral ground, but in humility for the love that was revealed to us.
- And we love each other sacrificially. Like God, we give of and share of ourselves sacrificially.
- This often recoils against our American individualism.

**1Jn 3:16-17** By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. **17** But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

- But it is more than just giving of material goods. It is giving of ourselves – of our time, our counsel, our encouragement, our compassion, our hospitality, etc.
- It is a sacrificial action that acts in whatever way looks out for the best interest of the other person and is within our power to do.
- We are called to love one another without end.
- In our fallen-ness, it may seem easy to make a choice to love today, but tomorrow we aren't "feeling it." Or to give sacrificially today, but be a bit more selfish tomorrow.
- While to love each other eternally like God loves us will be easy when we've been perfected in eternity, it can be a bit of a challenge now.
- To love one another w/o end right now, means making that choice on a daily basis.
- It means making that choice when the other does things that we dislike or that hurt us. It means patient endurance. It means continuing to act in their best interest.
- It means being intentional daily in our choice to love.
- And that brings us to v12.
- For when we begin to imperfectly practice this love, we will soon more perfectly practice this love.
- For the Holy Spirit working in us perfects God's love in us. Not God-like love, but God's love. That is a bold promise, but that is what the text says.
- When we start to love each other with God's unconditional, sacrificial, and unending love, we grow in our ability to love one another better and better.

**Jn 13:35** By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

- May God's unconditional, sacrificial, and eternal love be a source of amazement and joy for us, and may we reflect this love here, within the body at Faith, and among our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world.
- Pray