

# Born Again to Love

By David Harrell

**Bible Text:** 1 John 4:7-12

**Preached on:** Sunday, October 7, 2012

...and reveal the height and the depth of God's love. I think we fail to spend enough time mining the depth and unpacking the truth of this concept. God's love is a consistent theme throughout the Word of God. Both the Old and New Testament has much to say about this topic. And hardly any other truth about God is more important than his love. And I think this lesson this morning will present a strong argument for that. Yes, there is his goodness and his tender mercies, his loving kindness, his patience, his long suffering and his grace. All of this is an expression of his love. What the Bible has to say about God's love is not simple. It is not simplistic and yet as simple as this message can be, we see too many churches fail to truly appreciate the significance of his love. Yes, we understand that the verse that brother Jeff shared with us this morning during the Scripture reading.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”<sup>1</sup>

But the question is: Do we really appreciate what God had to do as an expression of his love to see this verse fulfilled? Yes, God is holy and righteous and just, but do we also consider equally his love. God's love is by no means simple. It is actually extremely complex. That is the irony of it. Due to the nature of who God is, God doesn't just throw a switch and randomly say you are saved and you are not. He is not going to somehow forget someone because emotionally at that time in eternity past he said yes versus no.

Now if you think about it, the love of God makes some huge philosophical and theological questions. You hear them all the time, especially on the television, on the radio. If God is so loving, why does he sent people to hell? Why does God allow sin and suffering and pain and sorrow? How can the Holocaust and natural disasters and other forms of mass destruction and other human suffering exist in a universe designed by God who is truly loving? Why does God allow the human race to be plunged into sin in the first place? And the list goes on and on. And these are theological questions that demand more than just a three word response such as the sovereignty of God.

Yes, we strongly believe in the doctrines of grace and the sovereignty of God. But when that is our response, we belittle, we make light of the love of God, the very richness of it, the very mystery of it, the very depth of it. I mean, in all honesty, while we may have this great head knowledge of who God is and his sovereignty and is historic plan of redemption, all this stuff which we are very educated in, and yet when we look in the mirror every day and we know that we struggle loving our spouses and we know that we struggle loving our children and we know that we struggle loving the neighbor and not sharing the gospel to people that we know are dying and going on a fast track to hell on

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<sup>1</sup> John 3:16.

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our campuses, when we know that there are people that are coming up as customers and we fail to share that message and we simply do not understand the love of God, the love of God which should be the cornerstone, which is the cornerstone to this theme of F. M. Layman's poem. For it is the love of God on which is the basis of the saints and the angel's song. I love that. I mean, I do.

I want the fact that the love of God is what we proclaim. It doesn't do away with all the other necessary and quite strong doctrines that we need to embrace in order to have a right understanding of who God is and what God's plan is for man.

My question to you is this morning, born again follower of Christ, do you realize why the love of God should resonate in your life? Why it should just simply resonate? Because I do not believe that a strong view of the love of God expressed in our daily life somehow does away with accountability and justice and judgment and being fair to God's Word. I don't. In fact, I think it complements it. It makes it even more effective in the lives of people that we are ministering to.

1 John he has a lot to say here, the apostle, in his epistle. He speaks of the five major characteristics of who God is, chapters one and two, speaks of God as light, chapter two through four that God is righteous, chapter five, God is truth and life and also back in chapter four speaking of God as love. For the sake of time I am going to skip the background information to John's first epistle. We are going to go straight into this message.

And our proposition this morning is technology. Go ahead and do that slide, please. Here in 1 John in these verses seven through 12 he is going to give us three reasons why the follower of Christ will passionately be compelled to love. And our first point this morning would be because simply it is who God is. God is love.

Look at the first two verses.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.<sup>2</sup>

Now John shoots right into this first verses here using that word beloved, which we speak very frequently here in the sense that this is representing you and I, those whom God dearly loves. We are God's beloved, because of our standing as children of God, because of what Christ did on the cross at Cavalry. And so John is encouraging believers to do this. Let us love.

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<sup>2</sup> 1 John 4:7-8.

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Now this word Love is a very specific word in the Greek. It is the *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love that I give and it is a love that we express which is not self esteem, but it is self giving. It is something that specifically finds its source in God alone. And yet what is really interesting is that this *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love was very rarely spoken of in the first century. That word *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) was not thrown around casually. And so it begs the question: Why? Why is word *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) ... why was it not highly used?

Now there are other words that the first century would use in regards to love which represented a self centered, self motivated love such as *φιλεω* (fil-eh'-o) love, which speaks of that brotherly love, eros love which speaks of that romantic or sexual passionate love. But here in this verse and through these other verses John speaks of the *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love, a superior form of love.

In verse seven there is an important form of Greek grammar here, the Greek oratory subjunctive verb that term for this word love which means it is describing love which communicates the idea, quote, that it is a kind of love that is just a possibility in the life of his readers. Instead of an absolute matter of fact, it is a possibility, not a matter of fact. I think there is a lot to be said about that.

While other forms of Greek grammar could communicate the idea that this form of love, this action of love is an absolute reality, this subjunctive form is telling us that we can assume.

Beloved, let us love one another, that you guys are actually, that I am actually doing that. I know that as a matter of fact. I am a walking subjunctive. I do not love people the way that I should. I do not love you the way that I should. I do not love my wife and my children the way that I should. That is why the Lord has blessed us with the idea of a process of sanctification. I am learning how to do that. But I can't learn how to do that, that cannot be pointed as a weakness unless we are going back and we are examining our lives. And this was one of the reasons why John is just so concerned about this topic about the *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love in the life of a follower of Christ. This *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love, it finds its source not in what you and I do, not in the fact that we white knuckle it, that we read the Scriptures enough. We are going to get that. *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love finds its source in Christ. It finds its source in experience. It is something that we are gifted with. It belongs to the new nature. It is something that is supernaturally born again, follower of Christ. Only they can experience that. And that is a phenomenal idea. I mean think about that. The rest of the world cannot even come close to being able to love the way that we do. We have this divine ability to love people in a way that is unique to us.

And so if *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love finds its source only in God, then anybody who demonstrates *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love, therefore, must be what? Of God. Must be saved. That is another wonderful, very encouraging point. I mean, I don't know, maybe it is just me, but, you know, as I walk and sojourn as a believer here there are times in my walk

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where I wonder, wow, am I even saved? I know up here I am. I know by the truth of God's Scripture and what it has to say I am eternally secure. I will persevere, but sometimes in a way in which I deal with family members and I deal with my children I walk away saying, "Wow, am I even saved?"

And so I look for those moments in my walk where I can say: Only God could have done that. Only the Spirit of God in my walk and that happened in my life. And when I express *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love to people that is when I walk away and say that is all you. I find the source in you and I know that as a result, I am yours.

If you look back at verse seven John continues on. He tells us that the true disciples of Christ are not just to love, but they are to love what? One another. Hard thing for me to do. I mean, I am just revealed and I am opening up my closet and saying, "Hard for me to do." To love one another, to love you guys the way that is very specific, that we are to show love for other believers. At the same time Matthew five tells me that I should also love my enemies, too. And yet I wonder. Are we better loving other Christians or are we better at loving our enemies? Sometimes I look at my life and say, "Hey, I am much better at loving non believers than at times loving believers." How can that be?

John also is addressing a specific topic here because of the issues of the false teachers that were in the midst of this church, the Gnostics, the Agnostics who had crept in the church. They were revealing their true colors through their lack of love for the believers within the local church. But I want you to keep in mind, John doesn't say that everyone who has been born of God loves, because, again, this would place the ability to love in an *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) form on us. No, it finds its source constantly in Christ. And so he presents sort of two parallel truths here. First, all *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love, one, comes from God. So any form of *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love, that comes from God. Two, therefore all *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) lovers, you and I to express that form of love, we must be born of God. Our salvation finds its source in God, our ability to love the way that God loves finds its source in God. That is, again... it is humbling and sobering truth. It isn't simplistic.

Because I think for many of us we still desperately and wrongly live is Christian life based on our own understanding, our own endurances and more. If I just do this, this, this and this, I am good. And it is not supposed to be lived that way. I don't wake up on Sunday morning saying, "Really? I have got to go to church? Sunday school? Pass. Wednesday nights? {?} Somebody struggling over here? Oh, not today. I am not up for it."

Thriving because you are going towards a very important appointment, traffic, really? I mean really traffic? On the most important day of my life, really? And yet each one of those responses is based off of an idol and the idol is me. It is because of me and what I value, not because of what Christ values that became more important at that time.

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Those who express *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love value Christ, value Christ's Church, value Christ's people, value Christ's mission or the Great Commission.

Yes, Christ is the source and the origin of self giving, self denying *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love. And that is why here John tells us in verse seven that everyone who loves with *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love is born of God. This would explain why believers passionate compelled to love with *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love, because they are born of God. It is supernatural.

Turn to 2 Peter chapter one. In verse four God:

“...has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature.”<sup>3</sup>

You are partakers of his divine nature, the source of our ability to express *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love.

“...having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.”<sup>4</sup>

Again, supernaturally transformed followers of Christ they are able to love in such a way because they have been born again. They now have this source of divine love which they have access to.

Now look at verse eight. John then goes on. He says:

“Anyone who does not love does not know God.”<sup>5</sup>

So John here is going to take a moment to really point out a blunt reality which is that any person who does not *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love, does not know God. Again, the grammar is very important here. The aorist verb to know tells us that this type of person has never come to know God. So you can't say, “Well, I am not loving God... you know, I haven't... I am not doing *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love right now and I really don't do it, but I am saved, you know, I am saved.”

No, if you are saved then you will love and show evidence of loving in such a manner as *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love.

The one who doesn't practice *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love as a pattern love—and, again, we are talking about this habitual pattern of life—does not and has never known God, has not and has never known God, has never been truly born again. They may {?} they may have

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<sup>3</sup> 2 Peter 1:4.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> 1 John 4:8.

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professed a faith in Christ. They have been baptized. They have warmed a pew. They have served in the Church. But they have never truly supernaturally been born again.

John then goes on and he IDs the fact that God is love. Again, the grammar important here. It only allows for one meaning. It does not allow anyone to understand this verse as saying love is God, because this verse, according to John is telling us that God himself, he is the one who defines what love is. For God is love. He defines it. He is the source of it. He is the model of it. And while he is the source and the model of it, it does not negate the fact that he is also holy and righteous and just and a jealous God full of wrath against his enemies. I think we would be in error to exalt the characteristic of love as the only supreme feature, but I do see it as an incredibly important one. Yes, while love could be a more acceptable aspect of God's character, we must make sure that we are accepting God and all of who he is in his moral character.

1 John 1:5 tells us that God is all loving, equally all holy. And all these attributes of God exist, they exist in perfect harmony with one another. And yet we noticed here at times it is very unnoticed truth at the end of verse seven, at the end of verse eight the fact that this word love it doesn't—and listen to me—it doesn't possess a direct object to receive the action. I know, ok, more grammar, good grief. But it is important. The end of verse seven and the end of verse eight, this word love, it doesn't have a direct object to receive the action of loving. Rather, what John is doing here is he is putting out that the lifestyle and the passion of God and of any believer they will be αγαπη (ag-ah'-pay) lovers, period. You are just going to love with this form of love. This is who you are. This is your essence.

You know, when we are thinking about individuals that are considered to be these very spiritual people, the Dali Lama, Buddha, Madonna, even the whole of the United Nations, and yet if you had to compare those individuals or that organization within individuals like pastor Harrell or John Parker or Aaron Hoffman or Jeff Beakley or Holly Cooper, what is the difference there? The difference is night and day, as different as light is from the darkness. These are people that have been transformed. They know have the dwelling of the Holy Spirit of God within them which now gives them the ability to be αγαπη (ag-ah'-pay) lovers, to have a personal relationship with Christ.

And yet what the world lifts up is this φιλεω (fil-eh'-o) and eros love and yet no matter how noble they might present it to be, it will always fall short of God's supreme αγαπη (ag-ah'-pay) love. The reason they reject it is because they refuse to embrace the Father and the Son. They might give assent to it. They might even believe that there is a trinity and that there is a Father and a Son and a Holy Spirit. But they will not yield to it. Yes, they will give sacrifices towards the trinity. But they will not show obedience to them. And that is the difference between light and darkness, folks. And, as a result, they will never be able to show the kind of affection and motivation for loving others as we as believers have the ability to express.

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And yet there is a question that at times I beg myself to answer. Why is it that I can look out into the world and see people that are not saved loving their wives and loving their children and loving others better than I do? There is millions of caring and loving people out there that are stepping into the gap. Bill Clinton is stepping into the gap. Madonna is stepping into the gap. The United Nations are stepping into the gap. They are trying to help people physically, emotionally, financially from hurricanes and droughts, earthquakes, all forms of natural and economic disaster. How do we explain it? How do we explain a world that loves at times seemingly better than we love? How do we explain it? What does it say about our perception of our standing before a holy and righteous God and our relationship with him?

I think no matter how well meaning and how effective and how seemingly loving the world and non believers, their form of love might be, their level always falls short of the ability that we have in Christ to change lives, to minister effectively to people, to love them in such a way where they would say, "Wow, it is not just about the words he preached, it is about the way in which we live, isn't it?"

I mean, I know pastors and I know Sunday school teachers. I know people who know this Word so well, far better than I do. And yet as you look at their lives, as you look at their inability to love the saints, you are wondering, yeah, where is the disconnect there? where is the disconnect? Where is the patience and long suffering and the mercy? Words of willingness actually step into the gap to make a difference long term in someone's life.

I think one of the failures that I have as a shepherd, but also as a parent and also as a husband is not being long suffering with the people that I love, with the people that God loves. And it is quite amazing to me that I wouldn't be, because if I really had to walk each day with a mirror in front of me, it would remind me of how long suffering, how patient, how gracious and how merciful God has been in my life, over and over and over and over again. It would literally be the clanging gong.

And yet at times the way in which I interact with other people, especially believers it is like, really.... Physician, look thyself in the mirror and heal thyself. Don't you realize how God has been extremely gracious towards you? We have this great ability to love one another and to love our enemies. But John makes one very strong point here in this part of the text, that human phileo or eros love will never ever be a legitimate sign of being a born again believer. Only the *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) form revealed in your life will point out the great confirmation of that.

We will reproduce ourselves like our heavenly Father in his nature we produce in that agape love it will provide that spiritual proof that we are, indeed, born again by the heavenly Father.

F. F. Bruce says this. He says, "Those who lives are void of *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love provide proof that they have never begun to know God no matter how confident their

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claims may be. To know the God of the *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love means to reveal his *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love in their life." *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love is probably the most accurate description of the gospel that is conceivable by man. It seems this concept of love is the hardest thing that we have the struggle to understand and actually live out.

In our second point we are passionately compelled to love because of what God has done in us. John goes on in verse nine. He says:

"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."<sup>6</sup>

Again, here in this ... the beginning of this phrase, "in this," those two words there refers to what had just been said in the previous verse, in this... knowing what we know, there is difference between God's divine *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love and the world's inferior substitute. First, the heavenly Father's love was made manifest though the very visible coming of his Son the incarnation of God himself in Jesus Christ. God became man.

Now look at the next incredible words. He was made manifest among us. Or, better yet, God lives. God ate. God breathed. God spoke. God loved. God died. God rose among us. This amazing truth. This is what God did in order for us to have this ability to love. He lived and he ate and he breathed and he spoke and he taught and he loved and he died and he rose. I mean, you listen to this statement and the only response out of your heart should be Jesus is awesome. And good grief, God lived with us and ate with us and breathed with us. He spoke his love to us. He taught us. He died and rose among us. He was on this special mission to come and to do these things. God the Father through God the Son through God the Holy Spirit they got together in eternity past so we have this great plan and you, God, you my Son are going to go live in the midst of them. You are going to love them. You are going to deal with their junk and their disappointments and their lack of obedience and all the goofy stuff and who is going to be greater than I am. I mean, the gospels are just lined with the nonsense that God with us did in the midst of us. Only God the only unique state Jesus being the only one of his kind, the only divine Son of God, the very Creator, the author of the Logos and he came and he lived among us. Good grief, I wouldn't. If I had a choice, heaven, the Hoffmans, heaven. I mean, good grief. Who would do that? That is bad duty right there. No way. But he did that.

Look at the end of verse nine. John explained how God the Father took this initiative by sending his only Son, sent himself into the world. Why? So that we might live through him. We forget that. God came. He lived. He died and rose again so that we will, one, have a reestablished relationship with him. He would pay the sin debt penalty. We would be restored to him and now we are simply tools that he can use so that he can live through us. That is the only reason why stay here. This is what we do.

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<sup>6</sup> 1 John 4:9.



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We are here to proclaim and to reveal who Jesus Christ is through us, by the way in which we love, by the way in which we αγαπη (ag-ah'-pay) love in our daily life in this fallen world. I mean you and I we are sort of like a log. Go ahead and show that slide. And each one of these lines here on that log, they represent the love of Christ that we express in our life. And people can't necessarily see that, because, you know, it is surrounded by this crust, by our attitude, but they can see it if we reveal it to them, if we speak it to them, if we serve people. We just come alongside.

You know, one of the most loving things is somebody coming up and saying, "Man, I see you struggling, brother. What... you know? Is there something I could pray for, you know? Is there something that you are struggling with?" And another form of that love that can be revealed outside of that bark, but too many of us are walking around like these sequoias, you know? Huge trees, this thick bark. Yeah, we are big, we are bad. But do you know what? We need to be showing the love that is within us, that αγαπη (ag-ah'-pay) love and expressing that to people, revealing that. Let it run the length of our life. Let's strip the bark away.

Part of this point of what Jesus is doing here, there is a sub point when God came and he paid the penalty for our sins through his Son. This is one of the incredible truths of what Christ did in our life, verse 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."<sup>7</sup>

It is here that John defines the very love of God which is not understood by definition, so to speak, but by an incredible, individual action of God, not that we loved God, but that he loved us. That αγαπη (ag-ah'-pay) love, again, did not originate in any action of man. It found its initiation in God himself. He sent his Son to be a propitiation, a payment for all the sin debt that we have built up in our life, that he would be the one that would pay that debt. This was his mission. This is what God devised and prepared back in eternity past that only his Son would accomplish for his glory, for his good pleasure and for our salvation, that God through Christ and through his sacrifice, that God the Father would be satisfied, the wrath of a holy God would be satisfied against sin.

It was God's justice, his mercy and his love that met 2000 years ago on Calvary's cross.

Dr. MacArthur describes the eternal life changing act of God in this way. Quote, "Jesus' love on the cross is the very heart of the gospel. The good news is not that God is willing to overlook sin and forgive sinners. That would compromise God's holiness. That would leave justice unfulfilled. That would trample on through righteousness. Furthermore, that would not be love on God's part, but indifference. The real good news is that God himself through the sacrifice of his Son paid the price for sin. He took the initiative, not that

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<sup>7</sup> 1 John 4:10.

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we have loved God but that he loved us. He was not responding to anything in sinners that made them worthy of his grace. On the contrary, his love is all together undeserved by sinful humanity. The sinners of whom Christ died were worthy of nothing but his wrath. As Paul wrote in Romans chapter five beginning in verse seven, 'Christ died for the ungodly, for one will hardly die for a righteous man, but perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But demonstrates his own love towards us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.' Because God is righteous he must punish sin. He cannot simply forgive guilt and leave justice unsatisfied. But the death of Christ totally satisfied God's justice, his righteousness and his holy hatred of sin. Some people shrink back at the thought of an innocent victim making atonement or paying the penalty for guilty sinners. They like the idea that people should pay their own sins, pay for their own sins, but take away the doctrine of substitutionary atonement of sin and you have no gospel at all. If the death of Christ was anything less than a guilt offering for sinners, then no one should ever be saved. But in Christ's death on the cross there is the highest possible expression of divine αγαπη (ag-ah'-pay) love. He who is love sent his precious Son to die as an atonement or a payment for our sin. And your sense of fair play if this is outrage, good. It ought to be shocking. It ought to be astonishing. It ought to be staggering to you. Think it through and you will begin to get a better picture of the awesome price God paid to show his love for you without compromising his character and who he is, holy, just and righteous. It is here that the depth and the richness and the awesome love of God is truly understood."

And you can just end the sermon there, just call it good. The divine love of God revealed in that historic plan of redemption. And yet John is not done. Look back at verse 10. That word love in part of that phrase where he said, "But that he loved us," it is a Greek aorist verb which means that God sacrificially loves. It did not just take place in the past, but exists now and has promised to be there in the future no matter what. I mean, as a believer struggling with personal sin, that is a huge comfort to know that I had one moment in time to experience God's love and it was, you know, way back in a forest home in the San Bernardino mountains and that was my moment of God's αγαπη (ag-ah'-pay) love and I, you know, just sucked the marrow out of it, but as soon as I walked away, boom, that is it. No more love. You are done.

But the reality is this. We experience God's αγαπη (ag-ah'-pay) love over and over and over. It is consistent. It is eternal. It will continue on. I mean, people, there are individuals in this sanctuary today, people within our church, people that we know that lack hope. They lack help. And to say that we have a God who created you and loves you and continues to love you no matter what the issue that is huge. That is absolutely huge. But the question is: Do we communicate that well? Or do we give them a form or a definition that we have somehow put together through our actions, words of deeds where God's love is.

God's sacrificial love did not just take place in the past. It exists even today. It is amazing that some believe that a loving God should not require to have some penalty

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paid to him. They suggest that this makes God less loving. I beg to differ. It makes him perfect. It makes him wonderful. It makes him marvelous. For what greater love than this that Jesus, the substitutionary sacrifice should lay down and give his life so that sinners like you and I might be saved, that we would have a Savior, a high priest to return to and say, "That is how I love. I follow the Savior."

In verse 11 John continues on and he says:

"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."<sup>8</sup>

As heirs of God's awesome *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love, John focuses, it seems, on really who letters here. Beloved, if God so ... it is a powerful two letter word, so, because it possesses this force of the apostle, the idea that of this absolute definite and powerful encouragement for each one of us. Beloved, if God so love us as his children, if God so loved us even though we have rejected him, we have been unworthy of him, we have, in our actions, words, deeds, thoughts, done things of incredible sinfulness and wretchedness and yet God so loved us, shows his great mercy in the midst of his holiness.

So if God so loved us, so we must also love one another. It is not the attitude of we have to. We want to. We are compelled by it. It is not that we are coerced. You know? Sometimes I have to coerce my children at time to, you know, love one another. They are fighting over, you know, battleship or operation, you know, who won in Uno. They show these attitudes which really are just symbolic of the attitudes that we show as adults. And yet sometimes I am turning things, love one another, you know? I coerce them to do that.

As believers we should not be coerced into loving one another. It is not an obligation. We are compelled because this is who we are. This is who we are.

And then our third and final point: We are compelled to love with his passionate love because of what God is doing even today in our own lives. Look at verse 12.

"No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us."<sup>9</sup>

Again, the apostle is using this subjunctive verb for love and it represents a pattern of life that we are supposed to, as true believers, to live and model to a watching world as children of the living God. And yet this love is being perfected in us, that process of sanctification is taking place.

For John expresses this difficult truth. He has us look very quickly at the very beginning

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<sup>8</sup> 1 John 4:11.

<sup>9</sup> 1 John 4:12.

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By David Harrell

**Bible Text:** 1 John 4:7-12

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of this verse and he shows this contrasting statement so that we can better understand the overall thought here in verse 12 which he states:

“No one has ever seen God.”<sup>10</sup>

In other words, no one has seen God in his fullness as spirit. Yes, we have seen him in the incarnate God man, in the form of Christ. We have seen him in the Old Testament theophanies, the burning bush, the pillar of fire, the pillar of smoke. But no one has ever seen God in all of his fullness and all of his glory. In John chapter one and verse eight {?} tells us that this invisible God is seen through his Son Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, the only God who is at the Father’s side. He has made him known through his Son.

But we also have this great privilege now of revealing a part of God through us, the one who abides in us. Christ abides in us. God abides in us. This is how we make God’s love through us. This is how it is become complete in us. A watching world can sit and consider, be challenged and maybe even be drawn near. Christ in our lives is sort of like wind and electricity, the two things that these elements have in common is you really can’t see it. Maybe in lightning you might be able to, in a spark. But most of the time you don't see electricity and you never do see wind. You see the results of it.

This *αγαπη* (ag-ah’-pay) love should be revealed in our lives in the same way. God’s love expressed through us though the indwelling of his Spirit, though the transformation of our spiritual hearts through his Word, that this love is expressed through us. God’s love has made an imprint on each one of our lives. He saved us. He made know the effects of his love in our lost hearts and minds.

At the end of verse 12 John continues and he finishes sort of this chain of thought stating that when we supernaturally love one another, God’s love is perverted in us. This *αγαπη* (ag-ah’-pay) love will be perfected as we reveal it. As this *αγαπη* (ag-ah’-pay) love is revealed to a lost and fallen world, the result will be that the love of God will find its complete and perfect fulfillment here on earth as part of the process. What you and I do as the local Church, the body of Christ, individual believers, we are fulfilling the expression of God’s love in this world through our individual lives and the things that we do and the things that we say.

I think we can speak on love all day and yet not quite get it. I am going to let Jonathan Edwards help my message out a little bit. It needs some help. Jonathan Edwards, known for writing “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” his most famous message and yet there is a second famous sermon by Edwards, the title, “Heaven is a World of Love.” In that sermon Edwards indicates that heaven is a place where love doesn’t just trickle along in a stream, but gushes forth in a mighty river. Then he goes on to say that these rivers of

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

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love swell, as it were, into an ocean of love in which the souls of the ransomed may bathe in the sweetness, in the enjoyment and have their hearts deluged by his love.

After commenting on the kind of love we will experience in heaven, he goes on to say, quote, "If you would be in the way to the world of love," by which he means heaven, see that you live a life of a love, of love to God and love to men. All of us hope to have a part in the world of love hereafter in heaven. And therefore we should cherish the spirit of love and live a life of holy love here on earth.

In that sermon and many others Edwards admonishes his hearers that if they were citizens, if they are truly citizens of heaven, they must bring heaven to earth. Doing this means, according to Edwards, shelving our personal agendas for the sake of our neighbors. It means that we will speak and demonstrate our love even or perhaps especially when it is costly and uncomfortable. Edwards says that in this world we must be real Christians and not just pretend Christians. We must live as real Christians and be much more involved in deeds of love to our fellow men. Moreover, Edwards calls upon us to imagine the impact that we could have in the world if all of us in the name of Christ were much more involved in deeds of love. In other words, Edwards is saying exactly what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13, our Scripture reading today, namely that if we want to have fruitful lives and ministries, we must be people whose lives are characterized by *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay) love.

My question to you is: Do you love people well? I don't. I don't think Edwards did either. But he was willing to express the need to be able to do that.

I am going to end with this story. It just came to mind. Lots of stories in this message today. True story. A woman named Betsy. She had this uncanny desire to want to share the gospel wherever she went. She carried this black Bible around everywhere. And whenever she ran into someone she didn't know, she would go up and she would say, "Do you know what Easter is all about?" A simple question. Do you know what Easter is all about?

And she would allow the person to respond and then she would tell them what Easter is all about. What Easter is all about is how God expresses love towards us that while we were yet sinners all destined to go to hell, he sent his Son to come and to live a perfect life, to provide a perfect sacrifice, to pay the sin debt penalty for every sin that they commit, past, present, future on that cross. He would die, but he would rise on the third day and because of that promise, we, too, will also rise one day to be with him and enjoy heaven forever. That was her message. And that was her consistent message.

Well, one day she was sharing that message in a hospital waiting room with an older lady who had a couple of kids running around. She looked a little frustrated. She is sharing that message of Easter. And then the nurse called her in. They drew some blood and the

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test came back and the doctor came up and said, “Betsy, I have some bad news for you.” He is crying. And she realized it is not going to be good.

She says, “Doctor, why are you crying for me? You just gave me the best news in the world, that I am this much closer to one day being restored back to my Savior, meeting my husband who has gone on before me, meeting all the saints that have died before me. Why are you crying? Why aren’t you rejoicing?”

She knew she had a few months and so she was living each one of those days the same way she lived the rest of her life.

Do you know what Easter is all about? She continued on. She found herself in a hospital room. And her nurse was just a crotchety thing and she asked the same question to that nurse. Hey, do you know what Easter is all about?

She said, “Look, lady. I am not buying it. Don’t want it.”

Well, I am going to pray for you until you come to understand what Easter is all about.

She said, “Well, obviously, you are not going to die then, because I am not going to listen to it.”

But every single day she showed this great love towards this nurse. And then one day the nurse came in to Betsy’s room crying, weeping, finding out that her husband had left, no help, hope, but she knew where to find it, Betsy, because she showed this great αγαπη (ag-ah’-pay) love. She wasn’t afraid to tell the truth, but was also willing just to love, too, in a way which is only unique to a believer. And on that very day she explained what Easter is all about and that nurse gave over her life to the lordship of Jesus Christ. And so her life went on. A couple of weeks went by and one day that nurse decided, I am going to go into the... go buy some flowers. I am going to bring Betsy some of those flowers that she really loves. She walked in and she said, “Betsy, how are you doing today?” Bible on her chest, opened up. She had her finger pointing at a verse. The nurse went up, took her pulse, found out she had died. She had passed away through the night and yet she is pointing the book of Revelation, the description of the eternal kingdom.

Will the...

Betsy’s pastor came by and wanted to talk with the nurse, just get some more information about what took place in the last few hours with Betsy and the pastor shared a story. One of the requests that Betsy had for her funeral was, one, I want *Amazing Grace*. I want you to talk about heaven. I want you to talk about God’s love. But then I also want you to bury me with my big black Bible and with a set of knife, fork and spoon on top of that Bible.

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And the nurse was... Why did she make that request?

I asked the same question, too. And she said, “Pastor, ever time we have those meals here at this church we have the dessert at the very end, well, that is the best part of the meal. And you always tell us. Hold on to the fork. Hold on to the spoon. Hold on to the knife, because the best is yet to come.”

The best is yet to come. But here is my point after that long story. Is it really best for you? Because given Edwards’ description, heaven is all about αγαπη (ag-ah’-pay) love and it is going to be gushing with it. It is going to be streaming with it. It is going to be an ocean of it. And if you are not digging it now, folks, you might want to ask yourself why, because you are going to be in the midst of it for eternity. Does that make sense? That is my challenge as you go home. Man, the love of God isn’t everything that is should be, why? Put that off because it is going to be {?} I am telling you right now. Put on another characteristic of Christ, because that is the only way that you are going to come to appreciate the fact that you have the ability to show αγαπη (ag-ah’-pay) love to one another and to a watching world.

Let us pray.

*Father, I do thank you for your Word, Father. Father, I thank you for your love. Father, it is a message that I don't believe anybody can do justice, but, yet, Father, your Word is complete and your Word is sufficient here this morning. Father, it is my prayer that as we leave here, if we ... if there is one nugget, Father, that you have your people leave with, let it be I am not the kind of αγαπη (ag-ah’-pay) lover I need to be. Father, point those sin issues out of my life, those issues of pride and of preference, of selfishness that just need to be put off, that agenda that just needs to be put into the scrap pile so that your love might be seen more completely in a way in which I live, the words in which I speak and the things which I do and the thoughts which I have. Father, may that be the nugget that they leave with. And, Father, we thank you that for ... in order for this to be accomplished it is not based on our own abilities. It finds its source in your Spirit and your Word. But, Father, once again, thank you for everything that you have done. It is in your Son’s name that we pray in Jesus Christ.*

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