



The Powerful, Purposeful Love of God for His People

1 John 4:7-21

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Next week, we are going to start looking at what must be our response to the love of God for us as His people, how we must respond to the gracious, steadfast, powerful, unchanging and welcoming love of God, but before we do, we are going to look at a text this morning that shows us the powerful and purposeful love of God for His people, a text that will bring us full circle and which will serve as a bridge to next week.. In this text we see God's love defined and we see its purpose and effects in us as God's people. The text I want us to look at today is 1 John 4:7-21...

We are not going to handle this text this morning in the way that we normally would. I am not going to deal with single words or phrases as much as we are going to look at this text sort of chunk by chunk. In fact, as I have told you before when we were studying through this 1st epistle of John a few years ago, this is the best way to read John's letters. John is not so much a linear theologian like Paul. When you read Paul, you see that he develops his thoughts in a sequential linear fashion – sort of building brick on brick. John is not quite that way. When John takes up the subject of speaking of God's love, he handles it like we might a large diamond. He picks it up and kind of spins it around and looks at all of its facets that explode out of the center. That is kind of what we are going to do today and I want us to begin by looking first at the center of this text from which every thing else explodes. We need to see 1st that

1) God is the definer and the source of real love (8b-10) What does it mean? "God is love." We live in a world today in which we have overused the word "love" to the point of making it nearly meaningless. We love football, we love pizza, we just love the way that dress looks on you, we love a movie, a restaurant, this time of year. Love has become nothing more than a fleeting emotion or feeling and it is absent any real foundation. Love has become a meaningless, overused word filled with empty sentimentality and false affirmations of people, even into an

excuse to do whatever we want to do because, after all “the greatest love is learning to love yourself.” Love has been used as a cover for every type of perversity and wickedness because if God is love, He overlooks sin, and if God is love He never sends anyone to hell, and if God is love then, he accepts anything I do and if God is love, then whatever definition of love I come up with, that’s my definition of God.

For that reason, “God is love” has been gutted of meaning and so it is not soul-stirring and heart-inflaming as it should be. We have to fight so that our souls will be moved with the words “God is love.” AW Pink rightly says and (I have modernized His words): There are many, even in Christian circles, who talk about the love of God, but who are complete strangers to the God of love. Divine love is commonly regarded as a kind of friendly weakness in God, sort of an Achilles heal, a sort of good-natured indulgence; it is reduced to a mere sickly sentiment, patterned after human emotion. The truth is that on this, as on everything else, our thoughts need to be formed and renewed and ordered by what is revealed in Scripture. That there is urgent need for this is obvious not only from the ignorance which so generally prevails, but also from the low state of spirituality which is now so sadly evident everywhere among professing Christians. How little real love there is for God. One chief reason for this is because our hearts are so little occupied with, we just don’t rightly think about, His wondrous love for His people. The better we are acquainted with His love—its character, fullness, blessedness—the more our hearts will be drawn out in love to Him.

That is why we have been doing what we have been doing over the last several weeks – getting reacquainted with the love of God. And that is why I am so thankful for this text. Into this muddle of confusion, the Word of God gives clear definition to the word love, to the true meaning of love and for that reason, Christians are the only ones who can truly understand what real love is. When God defines love, He does so by sending His Son as the propitiation (wrath-extinguisher) for death-deserving sinners such as you and me. John writes: 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. (1Jn 4:9) God is love and He shows us His love and the meaning of it, He reveals the character and depth and nature of His love, by sending His only Son into the world so that we, who were dead, could have life – abundant life, eternal life, the life of God dwelling in us. This is the love of God. God sent His Son, His only Son, the Son in whom He delights, the Son whom He loves with a deep, infinite love, into this world so that we, who were dead in our trespasses and sins, who were by nature children of wrath, could live through Him.

And so that we do not minimize and trivialize what God has done in manifesting His love among us, just so we do not think of Christ's coming in the same terms as someone running to WalMart to pick something up or delivering a package, God clearly spells out what God's pouring of His love upon unworthy men and women would mean: 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. (1Jn 4:10)

Here is what love is all about, John says. It is not that we have loved God. We haven't. The greatest manifestation of love is God's action to satisfy His own wrath, to remove the curse that was rightly against wicked sinners like us, and to take it upon Himself to make us holy and blameless before Him at the cost of the death of His own dear Son and to do it when we could add nothing to Him at all, simply as a display of His grace and a testament to His glory and as an outworking of His deep, unsearchable love.

Beloved, the love of God in Christ will never be all that it should be to us until we remember how fundamentally unworthy we were of it. Do you see what John is saying? We did not love God. We should have. He has made us and given us everything. God deserves the love of all of His creatures, especially man, but we didn't give it to Him. There has never been a man or a woman on the face of this earth who has truly loved God apart from His regenerating, life giving grace. Instead man has been content to delight in sin and not in God, to hardly give a thought to God, to rebel against His goodness, to despise His good gifts and use them for our own sinful pleasures. We were worthy of death. We did not seek after God. We were not longing for a Savior. We were not begging for a manifestation of His love. We were not pining for God's attention. We were rebels. We deserved everlasting separation from God in hell and God would not have lost anything of His glory to judge us all and condemn us. God is not indebted to us in any way. We broke God's commandments. We broke His Law. We deserve hell forever for high treason against Almighty God. Our sins rightly deserved death. But here is the love of God manifested, that He sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins. He has loved us in spite of what we are. He has loved us despite the fact that we have sinned against Him, that we have exchanged His glory for the pleasures of sin. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us; He set His love upon us and determined to bring us to Him and lavish His favor upon us. God loved us.

And He loved us and brought us to Himself in the only way that He could, by sending His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. So that God could bring us to Himself and so that He could

pour the blessing and benefit of His love upon us, He had to deal with our sin and our guilt and our condemnation and His wrath that we deserved as a result of our sin. He had to remove His wrath from us; God had to take His wrath out of the way, and the only one who could bear His wrath away, the only one who could absorb His wrath, the only one who could remove the barrier of His fury against us for our sin, was His only, begotten, glorious, and sinless Son. To love us, to shower us with His love and blessing, God the Father must condemn His Son. Christ the Son must willingly present Himself as a sacrifice in our place, He must offer Himself as a substitute, dying in our place, dying the death that we deserve so that God's wrath against us could be finally and forever extinguished. In this is love.

This is so important to understand. Too many Christians think of divine love as something that utterly overturns justice and sets it aside—as if God's love canceled out His justice—as if God's love defeated and revoked His hatred of sin, as if His love overwhelms His holy hatred of sin. God's love does not cause Him to forget about His holiness and set aside His righteous anger against sin. The demands of righteousness must be fully and completely satisfied if God is ever going to forgive sin. God's holiness must be upheld. God's love is a holy love. He cannot and will not simply overlook sin as if it didn't really matter. He will not act as if His glory is unimportant, as if righteousness is trivial. God's just wrath must be dealt with, and it is, in Christ.

Whatever eternal wrath comprises, the miracle was that it was compressed into time and poured out on the Son for us and the fullness of His wrath against the sins of His people was consumed, quenched, and satisfied by the Lord Jesus Christ. It is an act of divine love and mercy that maintains the justice of God, by accomplishing the payment for sin, and opening the way for Him to be gracious and merciful to we who are ungodly. God sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins, not because we deserved it, not because we were lovable, not because we first loved Him, but because He Himself loved us – How great is God's love.

Listen to these words from Charles Spurgeon: Quietly study the depth of the love of God to you his people. He has loved you without a cause. The grace of God is deeper than the depths of our sin, higher than the heights of our rebellion, broader and longer than the breadths and lengths of our depravity. Oh, the exceeding riches of the grace of God! He has loved you without beginning. Before years, and centuries, and millenniums began to be counted, your name was on his heart. Eternal thoughts of love have been in God's bosom towards you. He has loved you without a pause. There never was a minute in which he did not love you. Your name once engraved upon his hands has never been erased, nor has he ever blotted it out of the

Book of Life. He has loved you most patiently. You have often provoked him; you have rebelled against him times without number, yet he has never stopped the outflow of his heart towards you; and, blessed be his name, he never will. You are his, and you always shall be his. He has loved you without boundary. He could not love you more, for he loves you like a God; and he never will love you less. All his heart belongs to you! For you, Jesus left the throne of honor for the cross of shame; the brightness of glory for the darkness of the tomb. Oh, the depths of the love which is revealed in Calvary! The incomprehensible love of God is deeper than hell, and higher than heaven. It is as long as eternity, and wide as immensity. You will never, never be able to fathom the depth of the love of God towards you, in the gift of his dear Son to be your Redeemer. Oh, how ought I to love my God who has so loved me! Oh, how I ought to hate the sin which made my Savior bleed! The agonies of Christ call us to the slaughter of our sins. But who can tell us the majesty of Christ? When He was enthroned in the highest heavens He was very God of very God; by Him were the heavens made, and all the hosts thereof. His own almighty arm upheld the spheres; the praises of cherubim and seraphim perpetually surrounded Him; the full chorus of the hallelujahs of the universe unceasingly flowed to the foot of his throne: He reigned supreme above all His creatures, God over all, blessed forever! Who can tell His height of glory then? And who, on the other hand, can tell how low He descended? To be a man was something, to be a man of sorrows was far more; to bleed, and die, and suffer, these were much for Him who was the Son of God. But to suffer such unparalleled agony; to endure a death of shame and desertion by His Father, this is a depth of condescending love which the most inspired mind must utterly fail to fathom. Herein is love! And truly it is love that "passes knowledge." O let this love fill our hearts with adoring gratitude, and lead us to practical manifestations of its power. And that practical manifestation is found in this, the second thing I want for us to see:

2) God's love is given to us that we might love our brothers and sisters in Christ (7-8, 11-12) It isn't hard to see what is at the heart of these words, is it? If we have been recipients of the love of God in Christ, if we have been born of God and we know God as our King and our Lord, then we are called to love one another even as we have been loved. We are called to love one another because God has loved us. God's love is dynamic, it is active and vibrant and life giving. Loving our brothers and sisters in Christ is the natural outworking of receiving the love of God in Christ. So much so, in fact, that John says: Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. Now this love is not easy, any more than God's love expressed to us was easy. It is going to call for a continual dying to our rights, to our self centeredness, but this way is the excellent way.

Just as God's love toward us causes Him to move in self-sacrificing way to save us, for our highest good, so too, true biblical love for the brothers and sisters in Christ is a self-sacrificing, caring covenant commitment which shows itself in seeking the highest good of the one loved. It is not just a sentimental feeling, like so much modern love, because at its core it is a covenant commitment – an active commitment to the entire well being of the one who is loved. It does not mean always being “nice,” since sometimes the commitment to seek a person's highest good involves confronting them, but neither is biblical love devoid of feelings of compassion, tenderness, affection and warmth. In other words, biblical love involves delight, not just duty. And it often involves sacrifice on the part of the one extending it. It is an absolute commitment to care for and to act toward someone in a manner that seeks their highest good and blessing which is that the person be saved and be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. God's love for us compels us to love one another and the commands of the Scripture describe the nature of that love. How do we live out this kind of love? Paul gives the great description of love in 1 Corinthians 13. (1Co 13:1-8)

How do we love like this? It begins with your heart toward others. Esteem others greater than yourself, Scripture says. Instead of thinking first about yourself, your feelings, your rights, and your needs, we have to learn to think first about others. How can I show, even a difficult person, the love of Jesus Christ? How can I serve this person in love? How can I be Christ to this person? How can I love this person with my words, with salty speech that is seasoned with grace? Then you practice loving deeds. You look for opportunities to serve others. That is the kind of love that God says one Christian should have for another. Authentic Christianity means that we love our brothers, and in order to do that, we must belong to a covenant community of God's people and have a serious relationship with people, an invested life with people. It's not always easy. Sometimes it is downright messy, but that is how God's love is perfected – we are going to see that word again. It means for something to reach its intended goal. God's love reaches its intended goal when His child through the new birth, is a channel for His love to flow to others. That is one of the goals of God's love given to us. That is why John says: No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

The unseen God becomes seen in the love of believers for one another. Our love for our brothers and sister in Christ is evidence that we have received His love in Christ, of His indwelling presence and it becomes the evidence that God dwells in us and the gospel is true. Our love to our brothers and sisters in Christ is the overflow of God's love to us and abiding in us and it is one of the strongest witness of the reality of God to a watching world. In that way,

God's love is perfected in us – it reaches its goal in us – that we know that we are loved by God in Christ and we become an expression of that love to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

And that practical love is seen as we practice the one another commands of Scripture: Be at peace with each other (Mk 9:50) Love one another (Jn 13:34) Be joined to one another (Ro 12:5) Be devoted to one another (Ro 12:10) Honor one another (Ro 12:10) Rejoice with one another (Ro 12:15) Weep with one another (Ro 12:15) Live in harmony with one another (Ro 12:16) Accept one another (Ro 15:7) Counsel one another (Ro 15:14) Greet one another (Ro 16:16) Agree with each other (1 Co 1:10) Wait for one another (1 Co 11:33) Care for one another (1 Co 12:25) Serve one another (Gal 5:13) Carry one another's burdens (Gal 6:2) Be kind to one another (Eph 4:32) Forgive one another (Eph 4:32) Submit to one another (Eph 5:21) Bear with one another (Col 3:13) Teach, admonish each other (Col 3:16) Encourage one another (1 Th 5:11) Build up one another (1 Th 5:11) Spur one another on (Heb 10:24) Offer hospitality to one another (1 Pe 4:9) Minister gifts to one another (1 Pe 4:10) Be humble toward one another (1 Pe 5:5) Confess your sins to one another (Jas 5:16) Pray for one another (Jas 5:16) Fellowship with one another (1 Jn 1:7) because we understand that we are members one of another.

Do you see it? God's love is given to us in Christ so that we might be saved. God's love is given to us in Christ so that we might love the brothers and sisters in Christ. And the next facet of the diamond of God's love is this: God's love is given to us in Christ so that He might live in us and give Himself to us.

3) God's love is given to us in Christ so that He might live in us and give Himself to us. (13-15) We need to understand the thrust of what John is saying here...how this is all coming full circle. God has shown us His love in Christ, has sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins, for this reason -- so that He might live in us and through us, so that He might abide in us, and have intimate communion with us. You know, lots of times we talk about abiding in Christ – remaining in Christ, taking up residence in Christ and finding our life in Christ, resting in the perfect sufficiency of Christ' sacrifice for us, maintaining a spirit and attitude of entire dependency upon Christ, and drawing life from the fullness of life that is in Christ, right? But that is not the focus of these words, at least not entirely. When John writes: By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit, John wants us to see the way that God 's love for us comes full circle. He loves us – yes, He redeems us by the blood of His Son – yes, He gives His Son to be the propitiation for our sin – yes. But he does all this so

that He might give His life to us, and live through us and make His home in us. He does all this so that He might live in us and give life to us by His Spirit. So that He might live in us, by His Spirit, to guide us into all truth, to give us joy and peace, to give us gifts for ministry, to give us power and encouragement and strength to live Godly lives, to give us boldness to witness, help us pray, to speak through us for the sake of His kingdom and glory. This is one of the crowning purposes of God's love – that He desires to abide in His people. We, then, testify to the truth that God the Father has sent His Son to be the only Savior for the world...there is no other Savior, there is no other love. We testify by our loving the brothers as Christ loved, that the gospel of Christ is true and we confess with our lips and with our lives that Jesus is the Son of God. And we do it all by the power of the Spirit of God, the God who determines to live in us. So you see that the intent of God's love is that He would dwell in us...dwell in us. (1 Corinthians 3:16, ESV) But there is even more.

God has loved in us Christ that we might be saved. He has loved us in Christ so that we would love the brothers and sisters in Christ, has loved us so that He might live in us and so that fear of judgment would be banished from our hearts.

4) God desires that we know and believe the love that He had for us so that fear would be banished from our hearts (17-18) It is so important that we know and believe the love of God for us. What were we saved from? -- Our sins? Yes. Hell? Yes. death? Yes. But those are minor by comparison with this truth: on the cross, God through Christ saved us from Himself. From His wrath, His holiness, His justice and because Jesus Christ fully satisfied God on the cross, we need to never fear eternal judgment, condemnation, wrath or punishment for our sins but instead, we know we are forever the objects of His love. John wants us to know that we have no reason to fear.

Let me show you how this works. When the Spirit has done His work and the eyes of your understanding have been opened and you've been enlightened and your dead heart has been awakened and your blind eyes have been made to see and you've come out of the darkness into the light and the Holy Spirit has caused you to embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ by faith and God comes and takes up residence in your life and your life is filled with love for God and for your brothers and sisters in Christ, you will have confidence looking ahead to the day of judgment. You will not fear judgment because your judgment has been forever removed by the lover of your soul.

That is not to say that we should not fear God in the sense of regarding Him with awe and wonder and respect and honor and amazement. No, the idea is that God wants all His children to live in confidence. He doesn't want your life to be miserable and despondent here. He doesn't want you to live in fear of the judgment. He wants you to live in love, confidence and hope. He wants you to know that nothing can ever separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. In that light, John's point here is this: John's point is that as God's love grows in your life, it casts out the fear of judgment that existed before. God's love flowing through you is evidence that you are born of God and that evidence removes the fear of God's judgment. Therefore God's love as been perfected in you...it has reached its goal in you. It has taken away the fear of God's judgment. That is one of the goals of God's love to you in Christ.

5) The sum of it all – We love because He first loved us. (19-21) You see, beloved, it all comes full circle, doesn't it? John makes us see that the great objective of God's love in sending His son into this world to be the propitiation for our sins and to do all that He did, was that God might make of us such people that we should love God and love one another even as He has loved us. It is God's love that is the grounds for understanding and enjoying every other grace from God and it is why we must be absolutely confident of his love for us as His people. It is His love for us that calls forth from our hearts love for Him and love for our brothers and sisters in the family of Christ and even for our neighbor. Knowing the love of God in Christ for us is the foundation from which we can hear and respond to the greatest commandment – to love the Lord with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength and the second – love your neighbor as yourself. We can only love – love God and one another and neighbor – because God has loved us first.

Beloved, we have spent several weeks reminding ourselves of the love of God in Christ. Before we move on to talk about what it means to return that love, I have to ask you – Have you known personally the love of God in Christ? Have you? Does it stir your soul and inflame your heart this morning to realize that the eternal, Almighty, sovereign God of the universe has loved you and sent His Son so that you might live through Him? Are you humbled at this wondrous love of God that has moved His heart of mercy and compassion to the point of sending His own Son to be killed by those He would save? What kind of love is this? A love that is filled with forgiveness, with mercy and grace. A love that pursues sinners and makes them the children of God. A love that gives and gives and gives and gives of itself. A holy love. A compassionate love. A steadfast faithful love. A love that changes our hearts, that purifies our souls, that

makes us love in return, that takes away fear, that tells us we are precious in God's sight and that He delights over us and quiets our souls' fears. (Zephaniah 3:17, ESV)

This love is clearly defined in only on place – at the cross. Have you received the love of God in Christ?

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