

Love Came Down

1 John 4:7-21

I. Rewriting love.

A. *How can a loving God send somebody to hell?*

1. The assumption that sending someone to hell is unloving on God's part.
2. God's very nature is love, He cannot do anything that is unloving because His every action and every thought is an expression of His nature.
3. Romans 1:18-20

B. What about God's love?

1. Two premier passages on love in the Bible: 1st Corinthians 13 and 1st John 4.

II. Five reasons Christian's love.

A. God is the essence of love (4:7-8).

1. Love is to be a habitual practice.
2. Love = *Agapeo* – A non-human, supernatural love.
 - a. All people can love, but only true believers in Christ can have *this* love.
 - b. Agape love comes from God, if you have it, you are of God.
 - c. Agape love is a sign you are one of God's children.
3. Love is not a definition of God—(A.W. Tozer)
 - a. Love is an essential attribute of God working along with all His other attributes.

B. To follow the supreme example of God's sacrificial love in sending His Son for us (4:9-11).

1. God judged His Son Jesus Christ in our place.
2. His *only begotten* Son (*monogenes*).
 - a. Unique, one of a kind.
 - b. Abraham and Isaac.

3. His Son was the *propitiation* for our sins (4:10)—*Hilasmus*.
 - a. Propitiation is a two-part act that involves appeasing the wrath of an offended person and being reconciled to him.

III. Love is the heart of the Christian witness (4:12).

- A. God is invisible, Jesus is gone, the Christian is the only the visible representation of both.
- B. The Christian is called to demonstrate a love that is drastically different from the world's love.

THE ONLY DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S LOVE IN THIS AGE IS THE CHURCH!

IV. Love is the Christian's assurance (4:13-16).

- A. Nothing matters more than being sure of our hope in Christ.
- B. We can be sure because we have received the Holy Spirit (4:13)
- C. We can be sure if we have personally acknowledged and confessed Jesus as God's Son and our Savior.

V. We have confidence in God's love (4:17-20).

- A. Through "intimacy"—*A feeling of closeness and connection in a relationship.*
- B. God's love is always looking for and working towards completeness—perfection.

HE WHO BEGAN A GOOD WORK IN YOU WILL CARRY IT ON TO COMPLETION UNTIL THE DAY OF CHRIST JESUS.

Philippian 1:6

- C. We will be able to face judgement day with confidence that God's love will make us like Christ when we stand before Him—Righteous!
- D. Such a confidence casts out all fear.

Before love is a behavior in a Christian, love is an experience for the Christian. Love is something you meet before you do it.

We love, because He first loved us (4:19)

Love Came Down

1 John 4:7-21

The advent order

Today we complete the traditional four Sundays of advent... the four Sundays before Christmas...as we have been looking back at the first advent of Jesus Christ... when He came to earth as our Savior... and to His next, second advent... when He comes to set up His millennial kingdom and finally the eternal kingdom...

We will conclude our advent season by observing the Christmas Eve advent this coming Wednesday at 5:30 in our Candlelight Communion Service...

The traditional order of the weekly themes is not just arbitrarily chosen randomly... The four themes in order were **Hope, Peace, Joy** and this morning's, **Love**... the idea behind their order was to build up to the climax of the first advent... the birth of Christ...which is the greatest act of love ever...God sending His Son to the earth to pay the ransom of our sin.

If they had asked me for the order of these vital biblical themes... I would have reversed them... I would have begun with Love... It is the great love of God... who through His great love for us sent His Son to save us from our sin...and because of that great love... we then can have joy, peace and hope.

There has been much talk recently about this love of God...often rewriting or reworking Scripture to match our ideas...I heard this week on a podcast that God is the judge...and His role is to exercise His righteous wrath on sinful mankind... where Jesus is Love... That's all He is... a lover of all mankind... and he is the one who steps in front of His Dad to save us from His wrath...

Several prominent preachers have recently changed their views when it comes to Love, God and Jesus...If God is love... then He wouldn't send anyone to eternal damnation in hell.... The convenient way to change that is to get rid of hell...

Implied in the question "**how can a loving God send someone to hell?**"...[that is an argument for another time not the subject for this morning]...But that question... **makes the assumption that sending someone to hell is unloving on God's part.**

But God's very nature is love... He cannot do anything that is unloving because His every action and every thought is an expression of His nature....which is love... God alone loves in the highest sense of the word; He loves with perfect freedom and objectivity.

A 100% holy God who is 100% loving cannot coexist with the unholy and unloving... so He must keep Himself free from anything that would corrupt holiness...love cannot coexist with hate... so He does judge unrighteousness... the sinful... the unloving...

But through His love ... He has made a way from sinful man to be redeemed... to be cleaned from all unrighteousness... through sending His Son to earth... Christmas.. the first advent... to become the payment for sin...the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ....

“How can a loving God send someone to hell?” Romans 1:18–20 lays the foundation for the answer: **“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse”**

God has shown Himself to all mankind... He has made it clear that He cannot tolerate wickedness...He has shown them who He is... what He requires of every man to be fellowship with Him...this is true love!... He demonstrates His love revealing truth to mankind... so that mankind may choose truth!...if they reject this truth... they are without excuse... they are the ones responsible for God’s wrath being poured out on them...

The question really should be *How can man reject the love of God and continue on in his wicked behavior?*

What about God’s love?... this mysterious love that shows itself alongside a “just” God

The apostle John... through the direct inspiration from the Holy Spirit... has given a great gift for us... a wonderful treatise on God’s love... for our benefit... in fact... 1st John 4 is considered to be John’s masterpiece on God’s love to be placed alongside the apostle Paul’s great masterpiece... 1 Corinthians 13 [Which you heard read at the beginning of the service].

Let’s go through some of 1st John 4 together...we don’t have time to flesh out all the amazing truth in this passage... this could be a series...I want to pull out **five reasons why Christians love...**

I. God is the essence of love.

If God IS love, then all our definitions of what love is and how it behaves must be drawn from Him if it is to be rooted in reality. Unfortunately most people get their definition of love from the world...

(4:7) Key to the entire passage (4:21)—**love is to be a habitual practice**—evidence of your status with God. (2:10-11; 3:14)

Read 1st John 4:7-8

Perhaps you are thinking after hearing that... anyone who loves... is saved... **everyone who loves has been born of God**... But you know better... you know non-Christians... unsaved people who love... have good to great marriages... who are compassionate, committed benevolent people... so what's this mean?

Let's begin with this word "Love".... The Greek word *agapao* or *agape*... It's an ancient Greek word meaning "love".... many think it was a word invented by Christians in the New Testament... but it existed way back to at least Homer about 900 BC... the word meant love... but the definition was more like "affection"... a fond feeling of someone... more than "like".

By the New Testament times... the word was seldom used.... But the Christians picked it up and gave it its meaning... it became a "Christian" word... it was the apostle Paul that really formed its meaning into what we know today.

Agape love describes a love that is characterized by the love Jesus displayed... a love that exists in perfected from within the Trinity... it is a love that is non-human, supernatural love... there is no existing English word that can accurately describe it...

It is sacrificial love... it is unconditional love... a selfless love... Paul describes it as "exalted love".... it is a love that is always shown by what it does... not based on reciprocation... and the greatest illustration of what it does was God sending His Son to die on the cross on our behalf.

So I think it is safe to say... that the love in 1st John 4 is not the love of this world... it's not just affection... it is love only available in relationship with God Himself... This love in verse 7 is otherworldly love... **It is a love only received from God through salvation**... it is a love only able to be expressed by those redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Therefore... **this love is from God and everyone who loves (agape) has been born of God and knows God**. So this love is not the love of the world...

Interesting... thinking about Paul's 1st Corinthians 13 and 1st John 4...

1. If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

Paul says it is possible to do miracles, to have great gifts of preaching and teaching, to have incredible spiritual power, gifts, and abilities, **and not be a Christian at all**. Why?... because an essential part of being a Christian is to have this "agape" love... it's not an option... it is a characteristic of being a Christian!

Everyone who loves has been born of God—one may profess they are born again, but only those who display love like their heavenly Father have actually been born again.

God gives us the ability to love (agape).... Our love is now a sign that we know God... (saved by the blood of Jesus Christ) and as a result... we love others... because that is what agape love does!....not an option!...it becomes a characteristic of a saved person!....

You say you're a Christian but can't stand people?...that's a problem!...a big, big problem! **the one who does not love does not know God.**

Verse 8 ends with **God is love**...which is the theme and main point of this entire passage... **God is love**... how do we take that?...Is that a definitive definition of God?... sounds like it... GOD IS LOVE... I wrestled with this, this week... I remembered the first assigned book in seminary

A.W. Tozer wrote a great little book called *The Knowledge of the Holy*...which is about the attributes of God...ALL THAT GOD IS...Not “parts” of God... as though these can be separated out...All these attributes go into who God is...God is Holy... He is just... He is love...omnipotent...omnipresent... they all work in tandem

One chapter is called *The love of God*...referring to John 4... *The apostle John, by the Spirit, wrote, “God is love,” and some have taken his words to be a definitive statement concerning the essential nature of God. This is a great error. John was by those words stating a fact, but he was not offering a definition. Equating love with God is a major mistake which has produced much unsound religious philosophy and has brought forth a spate of vaporous poetry completely out of accord with the Holy Scriptures and altogether of another climate from that of historic Christianity.*

Had the apostle declared that love is what God is, we would be forced to infer that God is what love is. If literally God is love, then literally love is God, and we are in all duty bound to worship love as the only God there is. If love is equal to God then God is only equal to love, and God and love are identical. Thus we destroy the concept of personality in God and deny outright all His attributes save one, and that one we substitute for God.

... The words “God is love” mean that love is an essential attribute of God. Love is something true of God but it is not God. It expresses the way God is in His unitary being, as do the words holiness, justice, faithfulness, and truth. Because God is immutable [unchangeable] He always acts like Himself, and because He is a unity He never suspends one of His attributes in order to exercise another. [He doesn't park love so that He can pour out His wrath]

God is Love (1 John 4:8)

God is spirit (John 4:24)

God is light (1:5)

God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29)...all His attributes are working in tandem...together...

God is just in His wrath...that's not love sounding language! His wrath does not diminish His love... but His great love is demonstrated in His wrath.

Love is inherent in all He is and does...If God judges, He judges in love... If He loves...He judges. [His judgement and wrath are in perfect harmony with His love.]

The second reason we... speaking to Christians...love

11. To follow the supreme example of God's sacrificial love in sending His Son for us.

Agape love...

(4:9) By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

The judgement of sin on the cross was the supreme example of God's love. **He JUDGED His Son in our place**...[judgement and love are in perfect harmony] so that we might be forgiven....a great loving act... He sends His Son to the cross!... judgement!

John 3:14-16

14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 so that everyone who believes will have eternal life in Him.

16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only *begotten* Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.

(4:9) The only begotten monogenes...unique, one of a kind... God did not just send His Son, He sent His ONLY Son...that same word is used in Hebrews 11:17 to illustrate the greatness of Abraham's faith and obedience when God tested him... Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his one and only son!... [Gen. 22]

Think about that!...how long did Abraham and Sarah wait for a son?... [My aunt...cerebral palsy..."miracle baby"...then God says offer him up asacrifice?]

Abraham and Sarah waited approximately 25 years for the fulfillment of God's promise of a son. Abraham was 75 years old and Isaac was born when Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90.

And God tells Abraham to take his **only begotten son** and offer him up for a sacrifice... *How much faith do you have Abraham?...give up that miracle boy you waited for so long for...*

Only begotten is a big deal!...it shows the greater intensity of God's love for us...

What we have here is the idea of a Son who is especially precious and greatly loved because He is the ONLY one... God had only ONE SON... God sends His only begotten Son into a very hostile world on a rescue mission to redeem us and reconcile us to God.... THIS IS LOVE!

Supernatural...otherworldly love...

God would be 100% just if He left us in our sin! [That would not be unloving?]...BUT HE DOESN'T!... God pardons rebels... not only that... they are made "sons"!!

(4:10) 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.

Hilasmos Propitiation—Atoning sacrifice NIV *Propitiation is a two-part act that involves appeasing the wrath of an offended person and being reconciled to him*....the price of the offense is paid for... and the offender is now in good standing with the offended...it's all sacrificial

This precious only begotten Son was sent as payment...a sacrifice...an atoning sacrifice for our sins...and now we are in good standing with God...who we've offended through our sinning.

Get this... "*Love finds the means by which just and righteous wrath can be satisfied and so turned away...in order that forgiveness may be offered... and reconciliation achieved*". The means was God's only begotten Son Jesus Christ

THE ONLY WAY WAS AT INFINITE COST TO THE ONE WHO LOVES....GOD!

One said "*the depth of God's love is to be seen precisely in the way in which it bears the wounds inflicted on it by mankind and offers full and free pardon.*

God sending His Son for our propitiation not only ensures our salvation... **but obligates us to follow His pattern of sacrificial love**...(4:11) **Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.**

This is where the world usually takes exception...If God can love His offenders and forgive them through His ultimate sacrifice His Son... CHRISTIAN LOVE MUST BE SELF-SACRIFING LOVE AS GOD'S IS.

Supernatural... otherworldly ... a third reason why Christians love...

III. Love is the heart of the Christian witness.

(4:12) No one has beheld God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.

No one has seen nor can see God, He is invisible... No one can see Jesus... He is gone...Jesus is no longer in the world to manifest (reveal) to the world the love of God. All the lost world can see is us! The true Christian is the only light the dark world can see...

- But people are mean... hateful...unjust... unlikable... judgmental...

[Despite the challenges presented by the world's negativity and harshness, Christians are called to demonstrate a love that is radically different—one that reflects the sacrificial love of God. This means loving even those who seem undeserving or difficult, not because of their merit, but because it reveals the heart of Christ within us. Such love becomes the evidence of genuine faith and the visible witness to a world searching for hope.]

[The SBC has an amazing disaster response ministry... anytime there is a major natural disaster... the SBC is there... one of the directors was sharing about a time during the fairly recent floods in The Midwest.... Especially Texas and Kentucky...which resulted in hundreds of fatalities and widespread destruction across several states, marking one of the most severe natural disasters in recent history.

The SBC team sent hundreds of volunteers to help those who were desperate... he said a Chinese business man was visiting Texas during this time... and watched as these hundreds of volunteers help all these struggling people... he asked "why are they doing that"... you see... he was puzzled... he said that if this happened in China... no one would volunteer to help anybody... this is truly a Christian idea... it comes from love one another!]

THE ONLY DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S LOVE IN THIS AGE—IS THE CHURCH!

The supernatural love of God for sinners like you and me... is made more credible...more believable to the outside world when they see God's love reflected in and through our lives... Francis Schaeffer described this kind of love... "*the ultimate apologetic*"...Jesus Himself said in John 13:35

All men will know that you are My disciples if you love one another...

And how do we love one another like this?... we love like this because (12b) **God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us...**we know that we abide in Him... because He abides in us (Holy Spirit) and the work of the Holy Spirit in us **perfects that Godly love!** (more in a minute)

Summery (7-12) *God is love. Love originates with God, was manifested in His Son and demonstrated in His people.*

A fourth reason why Christians love...

IV. **Love is the Christian's assurance.**

(4:13-16) Because of this two-way abiding... we can have assurance of the hope of this Christian life...

In college I read a lot of G.B. Shaw... George Bernard Shaw...Irish playwright last century... in a radio talk he was giving a talk on the peculiarities of the English language... he mentioned that there are only two words in English which begin with the sound "sh" but are not spelt "sh".

A listener wrote in to say that this seemed untrue... there was only one such word—*sugar “su”*... I love Bernard Shaw’s response... He sent her a postcard with just one sentence...*Madame, are you sure? “su” [shre]*

Being sure is a perilous business... we’ve all made a statement or claim then the person we make it to says *Are you sure?*... and often we do a rethink... *well....let me make sure*... when it comes to your spiritual life... **nothing matters more than being sure of our hope in Christ...**

At the very heart of our Christian assurance lies the conviction John lies out here in these next verses:

1. We can be sure because we have received the Holy Spirit...the life of God in us...the greatest gift of resurrected Jesus Christ to us on earth is the Holy Spirit...who is the source of all the other gifts and graces we need in order to live consistently as God’s children in this world.

Read verse 13

In Acts 2:38 Peter assures us by saying **“Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.** At the moment of salvation... you received the third person of the Trinity in you... .think about that!...God within us!

Paul tells us to be **filled with the Spirit** in Ephesians 5:18...We are “indwelled” with the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation.... But...We are *filled* with the Holy Spirit when we consciously consider our actions and yield ourselves to the Spirit’s power, allowing Him to guide, influence, empower and govern our behavior....

[we can also hinder or stifle the Holy Spirit through sin...or just plain orneriness!]... it is through the power of the Holy Spirit we can have this amazing love. The living God within us will always produce the characteristics of HIS life—holiness...righteousness...mercy and love.

So we can be sure because we have the Holy Spirit... also because

2. We have personally acknowledged and confessed Jesus as God’s Son and our Savior.

Read Verse 15

To acknowledge something is to *accept that something is true to their claim* ...to confess is to proclaim that acknowledgement... the confession here is that **Jesus is the Son of God**... how is that an assurance of our great hope?... because only people who are saved have this abiding relationship with God... God in them and they in God...

The last.. fifth reason Christians love...

V. We have confidence in God’s love

Read verse 16

We begin with God is love... grounded in His unchanging character... as we walk in this love...by the power of the Holy Spirit in us guiding and empowering us... **we live in a daily relationship of trust.... And obedience with Him**... as we are more and more aware of this amazing love... we learn to rely on it more and more...

When you've been married for many years... Julie and I are coming up to 39... I think...no I know... we've been together for so long... we've been through life together to the point we know what each other is thinking without talking... we can drive for eight hours in the car and hardly say a word... not because we're boring people...[not just because we're boring people] we just we are so familiar with each other...

That's called "intimacy"—*A feeling of closeness and connection in a relationship*.... Which comes from familiarity...from spending much time together... That sort of intimacy with God is possible only if we rely on His love and live in Him...the more we do so... the more we know Him and can have confidence in His perfect love for us...

I think that is why God has us go through various trials... the God who loves us... wants us to rely on Him...trust in Him more fully...know Him so intimately we know how secure we are with Him.

Read verse 17

God's love is always looking for and working towards completeness... we are all far from complete... complete would be like God... God is perfection we are not... there's the tension... How can a perfect God be satisfied with imperfect you and me?

The apostle Paul encouraged the Philippians **He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.**

This is great news... because of His great love... and his abiding in us and we in him... the love we have is perfected by Him... so on that great day... of judgement in the future... we will be found like Him...Like Jesus Christ!

Amazing!... the day we stand before God...after Christ's second advent... God will look at us in the same way He looks at His Son Jesus Christ!... we will be clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ...

2 Corinthians 5:21

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him....because of this reality...

Read verse 18

If you are in Christ... if you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior... you are in Christ... HIS LOVE is perfected in you... there is no fear in this love... there is no condemnation in this love.

Read verse 19

What John is trying to get through to us....and what the apostle Paul was trying to get through to us in 1st Corinthians 13... remember...Paul went on to make a list of characteristics that describe and make up a description of love...

Love is patient, love is kind, is not jealous, does not brag, is not puffed up; 5 it does not act unbecomingly, does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered; 6 it does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never fails...

And this is so important... *Before love is a behavior in a Christian, love is an experience for the Christian. Love is something you meet before you do it.*

We love because He first loved us.

What is a Christian? A Christian is somebody who has met love, and love has shattered them, then captured them, and now empowers them.

What is Christmas?... the first advent?... Love came down...and dwelt among us...