

A Call to Love: Loved People Love People

1 John 4:7-12

Intro:

“Truth without love is harsh. Love without truth is mush.” We’re finishing up this two-part series on *Wise Love*. We need to be both. Last week, our focus was discerning truth from error. This week, we focus on love.

Why is it so hard to love...to truly love? I’m not talking about butterflies in the stomach, or natural romantic attraction that comes when you first date someone, or a rush of affection you feel when you hold your newborn in your arms for the first time. Those feelings are wonderful but often easy to come by.

I’m talking loving your...

- *Wife* when she cuts into you with a disrespectful word like a dagger.
- *Husband* when he made another stupid decision without talking to you first, acting like he’s still single and doesn’t have a family to care for.

- *Teenager* who just rolled his eyes at you after you told him to get off the game and clean up.
- *Toddler* when you say, “No touch,” and she looks you dead in the eye and stretches out her hand in slow motion to touch what you just said not to touch.
- *Fellow church member* who gave into the same sin you’ve been helping him kill for years, and he just seems to disregard everything you say.

True biblical love is hard. It takes effort, self-denial, sacrifice, and it takes vulnerability! When you put whole self out to love someone, you feel exposed. You’re opening yourself to hurt...to broken trust...to feeling used.

Plus, we’re sinners too. Love is not just hard because of other people, love is hard because of us! “I want my way...preference...comfort.” Therefore, when two sinners, both bent towards self, are in any kind of relationship with each other, it’s gonna be a collision of competing kingdoms.

But here's the hardest part: love is NOT an option, it's a duty. We must feel the obligation of love; which does NOT mean we muster up our willpower to love when we'd rather not. True love ought not be a *burdensome* duty. It should be a *delightful* duty.

How do you get there? John takes us on a little journey. He first argues from logic, making us think about why we should love. Then he puts on display the highest display of love in the history of the world so you can see it! And when you see that picture of love FOR YOU, you *feel* the obligation to love, and that obligation moves you to *act*.

Think, See, Feel, Act. With each step, he's building on this point: *Loved people love people*. When you truly know yourself loved undeservedly by God, you will love others. That's the point. Let's begin with the first step:

Think: The Logic of Love [v7a, "Beloved"]

It's not an accident that he opens by referring to them as "Beloved... Loved ones." You are loved by God. Do you know that?

Have you taken on as your main identity?
Loved by God. John uses that title six times in
this short book to remind us again and again
who we are—we are loved by God. You gotta
know that if you're gonna obey the command
to love. **[v7a-b, “let us love on another”]**

This is a command, but it's not too strong yet.
In v11, he says, “We OUGHT to love one
another.” Here he says, “Let us...” It has more
of an encouraging tone, whereas v11 has a
strong exhortation tone. Why? He's leading us
to v11. But there are some steps to take first...

Beginning with logic. He wants us to be
convinced of the logic of love, so he gives four
airtight arguments. The first is where love
comes from. **[v7, a-c, “love is from God”]** He
is the source of love. Any true love of any kind
finds its origin in God.

Therefore, true lovers have come from God,
which is his next logical argument. **[v7, “has
been born of God”]** If true love is from God,
then if you love truly, you've come from God.

John isn't talking about a vague, generic love anyone can exhibit. He's talking about true love—the way God loves. So if you've been born of God—new life has come to you from him, and you are now his child—then you're gonna love like he loves. Imperfectly, but truly.

Many of you met my dad last Sunday and it was funny to look at your faces go back and forth between us as you compared, not only how we look (I look like a younger version of him with more hair—though it won't be long before we have the same amount!)...

But you also compared our mannerisms, gestures, and how easily we crack up at highly unsophisticated jokes.

Typically, sons act like their dads. *That's why that same unsophisticated humor lives in the hearts of my own kids. (If you've been to our house for dinner...you know what I mean.)*

Those born of God love like God. And if you you've been born of God, then you know him. That's the next logical argument: **[v7, knows]**

If you love like him, it's because you know him. You don't just know *about* him. You know him; you have a relationship with him. You know who he is! Who is he? **[v8]** That's the last logical argument. If you know God, you're gonna love like God. If you don't love like God, you don't know him because God IS love. That's who he is! GOD IS LOVE.

One writer said, this is “one of the most tremendous utterances in the Bible.” (Knowing God, 106) Another said, “Love is not something God does; it is what God is” (Beeke, 159) Still another said, “John is not identifying a quality which God possesses; he is making a statement about the essence of God's being. It is not simply that God loves, but that he *is* love.” (Jackman, 118) He continues, “...to imagine that God does not love us is to deny his true nature, to repudiate his character.” (Jackman, 118)

Get that! When we question God's loves, we're questioning his very essence...we're question what it means for God to be God! He is love.

The love of God is one of his attributes that only makes sense if God is Triune. God is love and he has always loved, even before he *created* a world to love. The Father has always loved the Son, and the Spirit has always been that personal power of love flowing between the Father and the Son...because God IS love.

That's why John is encouraging us to love. It's from God, so if you've been born of God and know God, then you're gonna love like God because God is love! Very logical arguments.

But we can hear the best logical reasons for why you should fight to love your wife when she cuts into you with her words, or when your husband acts foolishly, or your teenager rolls his eyes, or your toddler stretches out her hand in slow motion...

But pure logic—even airtight, theologically grounded, biblically solid, persuasively true logic—in itself, isn't gonna compel you to love as you ought to love. What will? You gotta SEE love displayed for you if you're gonna feel compelled to love others.

We need a vision of how loved we really are by God. That takes us to the next step...

See: The Display of Love [v9, “made manifest”] That word *manifest* means *revealed, shown, displayed*. We saw it! Where? **[v9b]** The love of God was seen when Jesus showed up.

Of course, that doesn't mean God didn't show love before Jesus came. It means that the sending of Jesus, and therefore, the seeing of God's love in what Jesus came to bring for us, is the fullest, clearest, climax of God's love displayed. If you want to see God's love, look at what Jesus came to bring. **[v9, “life”]**

That sounds very similar to John 3:16, “God so *loved the world* that *sent his only Son*, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal *life*.” **[v9]** “Only Son” shows the utter uniqueness of Jesus Christ. He is the unique, one-of-a-kind Son. As John Calvin said, “He who is his only Son by nature, makes [us] sons by grace and adoption.” (*Commentaries on Catholic Epistles*, 239)

Jesus is the only Son by virtue of who he is. We become sons by grace...by the work accomplished for us by THE Son. What was accomplished for us? **[v9b, “live”]**

This is talking about eternal life. You only get that *through* him/Christ. That’s why God sent him—to give you life. You were on your way to eternal death, but God gave up his unique, beloved Son for you to have life. You know what that’s called? Love.

Can you see it? Maybe it’s still a little fuzzy. We need adjust the focus of our spiritual microscope as we stare at the clearest visual of God’s love for us. Look how John brings it into greater focus. **[v10a, *he loved us*]**

THAT is true love. “Not that we have loved God but that he loved us.” Do you get it? God didn’t love you because you loved him first. His love is not a returning-the-favor kind of love. His love is an initiating kind of love.

But it’s more than that. He didn’t initiate his when we were indifferent to him. He loved us

when we were rebelling against him. Romans 5:10 says, “While we were his enemies, God loved us.” This means God’s initiating love is not only NOT in response to our loveliness.

God’s love is not like a guy who initiates a relationship with a girl because he’s enamored by her beauty and charm, but she doesn’t show interest in him until he first shows interest in her.

That is NOT why God initiated his love. Deut. 7 says: “It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you.”

God loves you because...he loves you! His love for you originates in him, not in you. He initiated love because he IS love. Now, what did that initiating love look like? **[v10]**

You may have heard that word *propitiation*. It means to *appease* another. Jesus is the propitiation/appeasement for our sins...

Which means, our sins displeased God.
(That's the understatement of the century!)
Your sin displease God, but Jesus appeased
God. He *propitiated* God's wrath. 1 Thess. 5
says, "God has not destined us for wrath, but
to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus
Christ who died for us." Jesus Christ, on the
cross, stepped in our place, and absorbed the
wrath of God we deserved.

Do you see love displayed in the cross? Paul
said to the Galatians, in Gal. 3, "It was *before
your eyes* that Jesus Christ was publicly
portrayed as crucified." How can he say that?
They weren't there at Golgotha when Jesus
hung on the cross? How can he say this?

He's talking about when they first *heard* the
gospel. *When they heard about...*

- His back ripped to shreds by shards of
bone and metal in a Roman whip.
- Nails driven through his hands/feet.
- Spikes sinking deep into his head.
- His gasps for air as he pushed himself up
with his nail-pierced feet, while his lungs
collapsed in his chest.

- His scream, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

When they heard that Jesus died on the cross, what they heard was that he did that for them *in their place*. The cross became so personal to them, that it was as if they were there when Jesus died. When they *heard* the gospel, they *SAW* love displayed.

Do you see it? Do you see the undeniable love of God for sinners like you in the cross?

[GOSPEL Appeal] When you see such love displayed, it causes you to...

Feel: The Obligation of Love [v11a, “Beloved”] I hope that title takes on a whole new meaning after v10! “Beloved. Loved ones. Do you realize how loved you are? I showed you! Look at Christ hanging from the cross.”

[v11b, “if God so loved us”] “If he loved us in the way I just described, with an initiating, sacrificial, effectual, gracious, costly love... giving up his only Son for us, **[v11c, “ought”]**

We *ought*. He’s moved from encouragement to exhortation. Not “let us” but “we *ought*.”

It's not an option, it's an obligation! But at this point, it shouldn't be *begrudging* obligation.

Your kids ought to obey you as a parent because you told them to, but they can "obey" begrudgingly OR they can it because you've lavished love on them and they love you, and so they're like, "Of course I'll clean my room, mommy/daddy!" (If only that were a reality.)

John is saying, "After seeing the lavish, gracious love of God for us in Christ revealed in the cross, the "ought" is not burdensome." It's more like, "Why wouldn't I love after seeing how much God loved me?" When we behold the initiating, gracious, costly, sacrificial love of God in Christ, it does something to us. It compels us to love.

Kinney, this is why we never move on from the gospel. It's why we keep coming back to it again and again. Our hearts get dull and they become hardened towards people, and the gospel (particularly God's love displayed in the cross) softens our hearts towards people.

You got a hard heart towards anyone? Look at the cross. And then you'll...

Act: The Completion of Love [v12a]

What does that have to do with anything? Why drop this massive theological reminder of the nature of God as Spirit? No one has ever seen God because he is Spirit (not physical).

We can figure out John's point if we've been tracking with him so far. God is love and those who love like him are from him and *show* what he is like. Therefore, the love of the invisible God is seen when we love one another as we ought. **[v12b, abides]**

The love of the invisible God is seen when we love. That's a staggering thought! But it's not the main point John wants to make in this verse. He's not merely saying that the essence of God as love is seen when we love because God cannot be seen. That's true, but he's saying that to make this point: **[v12c]** God's love is *perfected* when it is shown to others.

Now, you should be asking, “How can God’s love be perfected? Wasn’t it already perfect? AND on top of that, how can MY love for others PERFECT God’s love?” We gotta understand what John means by *perfected*. He does not mean, “Make the quality better.”

He means to “bring to its intended goal.” It could be translated *completed*. The intended goal of God’s love was for it to flow out through his people so that the love of the invisible God could be made visible, and therefore, complete.

Get this. When you...

- Give a soft answer to your wife after she cuts you with a disrespectful word, you’re showing something about what God is like in his kindness toward the unkind.
- Are patient with your husband after he makes a stupid decision, you’re showing something about what God is like in his infinite patience with foolish sinners.
- Give a firm, but calm correction to your teenager after he rolled his eyes at you, you’re showing something about what

God is like as he lovingly and firmly corrects his children.

- Discipline your toddler in much self-control after they stretched out their hand to touch what is no-touch, you're showing something about what God is like in his discipline of his children *whom he loves*.
- Pray with that fellow church member who has given into that same sin again, and then you gently warn them of the dangers of unrepentance, you're showing something about what God is like when he lovingly warns to his people.

Conclusion

Loved people love people. Do you know yourself loved by God? You are loved far more than you can imagine. Kinney...love...even when it's hard because you are loved.