



**1 John 4:7-8**  
**Love One Another**

We've spent several weeks looking at what John has to say about our relationship with the Holy Spirit. Beginning this morning though, and just in time for the romance of Spring, we're going to be looking at what John has to say about love.

It's a simple word, it's something that is known or experienced by every one of us in varying degrees. We've all heard of love, we all understand love, to some level... or at least we think we do.

For the next several weeks we're going to discover some interesting things the Bible has to say about love. And at times we're going to love it. We're going to thoroughly enjoy it and be built up by it, it's going to be encouraging to us. And at other times, well, it's going to beat us up. It's going to shine the light of truth on the shadows we like to hide in and it's going to show us things we'd really rather not see about ourselves.

But that's what God does, *because* He loves us. He helps us see our place, He calms our fears, He brings us hope and comfort and strength, but He also shows us the sources of our failures, embarrassment, and weaknesses *so that we can grow in Him*.

This morning we begin by considering, what Biblical love is, why we should love, and who we should love. By now you know from our prior studies that God is in us as Christians, but He's not content with that, He also wants to flow through us and impact the lives of others. So John writes:

**1 John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.**

"Love" is not a uniquely Christian idea; it has existed in all cultures throughout time. But different cultures and different ages have had different ideas about what it meant to love. For example, when the New Testament was being written, the Greek ideas of love centered much more around friendship. In Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century love centered around romance and was full of poetry and elaborate courting rituals. Today, we view love as something mysterious but powerful that you fall into and feel personally. It drives you wild and controls you instead of you controlling it. We say someone is 'passionate' when their emotions overrun their self-control.

But God needed to help us acquire an understanding of love that doesn't change based on your culture or your moment in history. He needed to communicate timeless truths about the love we experience and the love we're to show to others. And that is why the authors of

the New Testament took a little used Greek word and poured meaning into it; Christians practically wrote the definition of what it means to show *agape* love.

*Agape* is the Greek word for love used sixed times here in verses 7-8. It's also the word used for love in

**John 3:16** For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

And it's the word for love behind 1 Corinthians 13, that famous Biblical chapter on love:

**1 Cor 13:1** Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. **2** And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. **3** And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. **4** Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; **5** does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; **6** does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; **7** bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. **8** Love never fails....

Isn't this the love we all hope to experience? Isn't this what we're all hungry for? If people could just be like this toward us, wouldn't everything be great?

Of course it would. But as much as we're inspired by the Biblical ideals of love, what we actually live with every day is a twisted sense of love that has turned back in on itself.

You and I are far more affected by the cultural notions of romantic love all around us. And it has shaped us into creatures that want to *be* loved more than we want *to* love. We want to consume love, not produce it, and when we do want to love, it's often for selfish reasons because we like the way loving makes us feel.

Meanwhile, the Bible talks to us about a very different kind of love – a love that certainly involves our feelings, but also involves the mind, the will, and the physical body and yet, for all of that, what really makes the God's view of love unique is how it sees others.

Most ideas of love involve desire – I see something in the other person that I want or desire or approve of. I like what I see in you and therefore I like having you around me. You make me better.

But Biblical love emphasizes the value and need of others. I want to make you better. I want to help you. I don't want to bring you into me; I want to give myself to you. Jesus said, "**Greater love has no man than this, that He lay down His life for a friend**" (John 15:13).

The opposite of this, and one of the best indicators of a failing relationship is the presence of contempt.

Contempt is a blend of anger, disgust, and frustration all rolled together. Contempt says, “I don’t like you because I don’t like the way you do this. I don’t like the way you say that. I don’t like the way you dress. You don’t deserve that. There you go doing that again.” I am actively spewing animosity toward you instead of love.

And it’s easy for us to be that way. It’s easy for us to be critical and unloving, because, as I’m sure you’ve noticed: the world is full of provocations. And yet, have you ever read this verse in your Bible?

**Romans 5:8** God demonstrates His own love [ἀγάπην, *agapen*] toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Does that make sense?

Of course not.

Well, it does if you consider the fact that God is the one doing it, but does it make human sense to love someone in the middle of their sin? Does it make human sense to love someone while they’re being an idiot? While they’re offending us? While they’re ignoring us? No. It doesn’t. And yet, that’s what love, *agape* love, does because it is a love that is more focused on what others need than how they make me feel.

God wants me to understand that He loves me when I’m not lovely. And He tells me to do the same for others.

This past week I saw a video of two men working to release a mountain lion from a snare in Utah.<sup>1</sup> They wanted to help the lion, but it was obviously in pain, it was lashing out, and if it could have, it would have mauled them to pieces in its anger and pain.

But these men weren’t the ones who set the snare. They were the park rangers who were attempting to free it. And they were having a pretty rough time of it. They had some poles to use to hold his head and his back leg, they knew what they were doing, but this mountain lion was not interested in receiving their help at all. He wasn’t making their task easy.

And you know what? At any point, they could have just said, “Forget it. It’s not worth it.” And just left.

They could have let him sit there and suffer for a while as they made the long trek to go get a tranquilizer. But they didn’t. They kept after it, and eventually got him released. And you know how that went right? He didn’t stop and thank them; he didn’t come over and lick

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ksl.com/?sid=38743546&nid=1288>

them like a pet cat. He didn't suddenly understand and appreciate all their effort for him. No, he ran off. And they were thankful he did.

Friends sometimes that what *agape* love feels like, isn't it? "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

And yet God commands us to show this kind of love to people that we are locked into relationships with. This is the kind of love I am called to show my spouse, my children, my parents and other people in the church. I'm called to show up and help people who obviously need help, but who might be swinging and snarling as they struggle with the snare they're caught in.

And some of you need to be reminded of that this morning. You need to love that mountain lion God has put in your life. You need to see past the snapping and snarling, the ugliness, the bitterness, the meanness, and you need to see that the real reason they're so ornery is because their paw is caught in a snare of sin. And until they're released from that trap, they're going to keep hissing at you. Pray for them, love them, and see the root cause of what it going on.

But before you go feeling the weight of that obligation as if it's a crushing load and a dreadful task, let's go back and remember how this command to love is addressed:

**1 John 4:7** *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.*

Now, we don't often make a big deal about the original languages of the Scriptures here at City Gates. We don't talk a lot about root words and verb tenses and conjugations. And there's a reason for that – I feel like sometimes when you hear a sermon where the pastor is telling you all this stuff that's going on in the original language, it can make it seem like you can't really read the Scriptures on your own at home because you don't know Greek, or Hebrew, or Aramaic. And I don't want you to feel that way – I want you to be able to crack open your Bible and say, oh yeah, I see where he got that from, I want you to be able to follow along.

But this morning is one of the rare exceptions. There is some really cool stuff going on in the original languages and I've got to nerd out on you a bit. But you can follow this, trust me.

Some translations start verse 7 with "Dear friends." That's OK, but the word is really ἀγαπητοί, *agapetoi*. Most translations have it as "beloved." Another translation has it as, "Divinely loved ones."

And then the very next word in the Greek is ἀγαπῶμεν *agapomen*. So, ἀγαπητοί ἀγαπῶμεν, *agapetoi, agapomen*. You who are loved, loved others.

John is calling us to be reflectors, to be conduits, to receive the love of God and then show it to others. As he puts it so simply later on in vs. 19, “we love because He first loved us.”

When you find it hard to love the lion, remember that you’ve been the lion. Sometimes, and to some people, you’re still the lion – snarling and snapping at people around you who didn’t have anything to do with the pain you’re in. But they, and God, love you anyway. So, *“Beloved, let us love one another.”*

And why? *“For love is of God.”* And, as he says later, *“God is love.”* That’s important to understanding all of this, isn’t it?

God is the great initiator – He’s the one who comes to us first, when we are least lovely and loveable and sets us free in Christ. He makes something beautiful out of us; He chooses us for His own reasons and purposes and frees us, in Christ, from our own self-destruction and sin, because He is love.

God fills the entire definition of love and practically splits it open, like a man squeezing into a T-shirt that is two sizes too small – God is more than love yet there is nothing that is love that He is not.

There’s nothing you can learn about real love, *agape* love, that won’t help you understand more of God. And, as you begin to know more and more about God and His nature and His Word, as you begin to understand more of Jesus, the more you understand, and hopefully the more you show, of love.

This is why I tell people if you want to grow in love, grow in God. The best thing you can do for your marriage – either your current marriage or your eventual marriage is to grow in your relationship with God. He will mold you, He will shape you and stretch you, He’ll show you love, make you more lovely, and show you how to love others. If you have any concerns about a relationship you have, don’t focus solely on the love, focus on God who will show you how to love. He’ll even show you how to love a mountain lion if you need to.

And here’s where we jump back into the language stuff again – you’re getting mountain lions and Greek vocabulary today, this is a good Sunday, huh?!?

The Greek behind the phrase *“love is of God”* is ἀγάπη ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, *agape ek tou theou*. It means love [*agape*] proceeds forth out of [*ek*] God [*tou theo*] as its source. Picture water gushing up from a fountain. It comes up out of it. That’s *ek*. When God is squeezed, love comes out.

And it proceeds to us. We are the beloved. Love comes out from God and impacts us. But then, watch this:

*“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God [ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ]; and everyone who loves is born of God [ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ] and knows God”*

It's the same phrase. It's the same idea. Love comes forth from God and we are birthed by God. Given new life by God. Born-again by God.

But then, as He propels me out with His love, God gives me that great commandment to love Him and love others. I'm sent out in love and called back to love. It's like a circuit being completed. It's like riding a ride at an amusement park, I get strapped into some little car, and launched out into life where I have highs and lows, I scream a little bit and get rattled around and then I return right back to where I started from on this little track of love.

But of course, God doesn't send me out alone – remember that we've been seeing that when you are born again, the Holy Spirit comes to reside in you. There is a very real change in the composition of a Christian. It might not be seen on an MRI or an X-ray, and yet it does occur. So if love proceeds forth from God, if *agape ek tou theou*, and God is in us, then everywhere we go, the love of God ought to be proceeding forth from Him *in us*, right? Isn't that what the Bible says in Romans 5:5 “the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

God is calling us to do something, to love others, but He's the source and strength and supply of everything He's calling us to do. “I must decrease, He must increase.”

In fact, if it's not happening, there's a problem.

**1 John 4:8** He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

It's so natural for God's love to flow through us that if it never happens, it's like claiming to be good friends with a foreigner who speaks another language that you don't speak.<sup>2</sup> How close can you be?

Friends, we're allowed to know God. God isn't supposed to be a mystery. But not all religions teach that. The Muslim doesn't know God with this kind of intimacy. He may fear Allah, serve Allah, hope Allah is merciful, but he doesn't *know* Allah. I knew an imam once who told me, “If you speak to Allah, that's good. If Allah speaks to you, you're crazy.”

Don't take these essential elements of your Christian faith, like knowing God, for granted. You have something other people do not have. You have the knowledge of God, of course it should make a difference in your life. Relish it, cherish it, let it transform you so that the love of God flows out from you – *ek tou theou*.

OK, so you know that He calls you beloved and sends you out to love. But to love who? Well, here's where things get really interesting:

**1 John 4:7** Beloved, let us love one another...

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<sup>2</sup> Stott.

So who are we supposed to love? We're supposed to love "one another!" Friends, this is written to the church! An apostle is encouraging Christians, "let us love one another."

One translator puts it this way: "Divinely loved one, let us be habitually loving one another with a divine and self-sacrificial love."<sup>3</sup> In other words, let's manifest God's love toward each other – let's benefit one another.

That's a message the Bible repeats time and time again:

**1 Peter 1:22** "...love one another fervently with a pure heart..."

**Heb 10:24** "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works"

There is a communal aspect to the command. It's reciprocal. There is a cycle of blessing, "Let us be habitually loving one another."

John is included in all of this himself. He's saying let me love you, and you love me. Those of you in ministry need to let that settle in, and those of you who receive ministry need to do the same.

What does it mean for Christian leaders to love their people? What kind of sacrifice and effort will that require at times? What kind of lions will you have to help release? I don't know if you've learned this yet, but ministry isn't all happy songs and cups of coffee. It's a burden at times, it's an effort at times, it's discouraging and frustrating and dull at times. But when it feels that way, remember you're not there to do it on your own. You're there because it's what God has called you to do. He has come to you, brought you new life, given you spiritual gifts and a holy calling and now, beloved, He's simply calling you to show others the love you have already been shown.

And Christian, you are called to love your leaders. To seek their good. I tell people all the time, pray for your pastor selfishly. Ask God to help me grow. Ask God to speak to me through His Word. Ask God to bless my time with Him SO THAT when I come up here each Sunday I have something to say that God wants you to hear. Do you pray that way? Do you pray for your ABF leader, your home group host, your youth pastor? Do you love them? John says, "Beloved, let us love one another."

Of course, that means all of us, doesn't it, not just the leaders. So what does it mean for members to love each other?

God has called us into the church; this is where Christians are supposed to be. God didn't ordain home groups, or ministries, or women's studies to be our primary spiritual home; He ordained the church. Those other things are good additions if you can fit them in, but the first priority God has given to Christians is to be in the church.

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<sup>3</sup> Wuest.



But here's the problem – all those other Christian groups and activities we get involved outside the church tend to be based on me – what I'm like, what I like to be involved in, and they're often full of other people somewhat like me. The church on the other hand, if it's healthy, will be full of people who aren't like me. People I have a hard time with, to be honest. And yet, we're called to be together. To sing each other's songs. To dress differently. To have different social graces and interests.

Friends, look around you – look at the person two seats in front of you, or the person on your left or right, these are the people you are called to love – whether you like them or not. These are people you're commanded by God to be lovely towards. This is where we work out our sanctification; this is where we work on growing in the grace of God. **“Beloved, let us love one another.”**

And then we work on exporting what we're practicing in here to the outside world. We learn our manners at home so we don't embarrass our parents in public, right?

So let me ask, what would it mean for us to love the world? Do we see the value of people who are currently outside the church?

My personal conviction is that one of the greatest needs in our society today is for people who will care, and care about you personally. But you can't outsource caring or develop a program and strategy for caring. It has to be real, and it has to come from real people.

People are most often won to Christ by love, 80% of people come to church, not because of a book they read or a debate they heard, but because someone – a friend, a neighbor, a co-worker, invited them to come.

Next week we're going to have some guests. People will come to our house here on the hill to celebrate Easter with us. What will they find when they arrive? Will we be known by our love for one another, for God, and for them?

If they show up here and they're an ornery mountain lion caught in a snare of sin, will they find a group of people who are patient, kind, willing to help, and sacrificially loving each other? I hope so. I believe so. And if you have any doubt about whether they'll find it coming out of you, just remember that you yourself are loved.

**1 John 4:7** Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. **8** He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.