

Dear Children, Love as Your Father Loves
1 John 4:1-12

First Presbyterian Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

June 17, AD 2018
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I continue to discover new things about my father that shape me. When I was eight, I wanted to go outside and play right as our neighbor called to say that his car was broken down in the town next door. My father said, son, we go help our neighbors, now..... that's what we do! I had never heard my father speak with this much clarity and resolve.

Another time when I was in middle school, we were on vacation and I was asked to stay awake with my Dad as he drove us through the night. He began telling me stories of his time being drafted into the army during the era of Vietnam. I had always known that my dad was in the army, but at the age of thirteen, with an American History class under my belt, I listened with a whole new understanding of my dad's courage and resolve. Now I am watching my father be a grandfather to my children. I love discovering this incredibly generous side of him blossom. It is wonderful to see him bless my kids.

In our text today, we are going to discover truths about our Heavenly Father - namely that God is love. The challenge with saying that God is love is that we have heard that phrase so much in our Western culture that the depth and power of this reality can fail to astound us. My goal of preaching this text is that you discover in fresh new way this morning that God's love is unique. It is unique in that **it is not from this world**, God's love is unique in that **it is not like the world's**, and God's love is unique in that **it empowers us to love those in the world**.

God's love is unique in that it is not from this world: The enemy of this world is making a concerted effort for you to not know God's love, therefore we need to be on guard.

In I John 4, John starts out admonishing his listeners not to believe every spirit, but to test them whether they are from God. He says that false prophets have gone out into the world. Israel was very familiar with prophets. A prophet is one who is called and empowered by God to declare His will to the people and guide them at critical moments in the history of Israel. They were spokesmen heralding impending judgement (Jonah 3:4), "Jonah cried out, 'In forty days, Nineveh will be overthrown.'" The prophets revealed future events. Isa 7:14, "Behold, the virgin

shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” The OT prophets received dreams, worked miracles, gave advice, appointed kings and leaders, and had the responsibility of being intermediaries between God and His people.

But not all who claimed to be prophets in the Old Testament, nor in John’s day, were telling the truth. Sometimes their messages originated in themselves. Jer 23:16 “Thus says the LORD of hosts: “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, ^cfilling you with vain hopes. ^dThey speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD.” Sometimes their messages were occasioned by popular demand or for financial reward. Ezek 13:19, “You have profaned me among my people ^ufor handfuls of barley ^vand for pieces of bread, putting to death souls who should not die and keeping alive souls who should not live, by your lying to my people, who listen to lies.”

Jesus himself said in the last days there will be false teachers that will lead the people astray. The purveyors of false truth in I John 4 are lead by a spirit that John says is not from God. John says that ultimately there are only two spirits; the Spirit of God, and the spirit of the antichrist. The topic of the antichrist is often discussed around the water cooler, but what does the Bible say? In the book of Ezekiel and Daniel - he is described as an antagonist. In II Thes 2 - antichrists are described as coming in the latter days and that the spirit of the antichrist is already at work in a corporate way. There is a corporate spirit that will culminate in an end time figure to deceive. Who exactly? We just don’t know, but we do know that he inspires false teachers right now.

Who are the modern day spirits of error? There are the “religions” that claim to be somewhat Christian. The Jehovah’s Witness and Mormons both teach about Jesus, but they teach he was a created being that became a god. The Christian Science cult is a modern day form of New Testament heresy called Gnosticism that sought to deny the reality of the body and in fact all of physical matter.

Other spirits of error are more subtle, trying to deceive you into false beliefs about your Heavenly Father. The false prophets of materialism and the so called prosperity gospel are trying to deceive you into thinking that this earthly life is meant to be heaven now. These prophets don’t want you to resist, suffer, and deny yourself; even though Jesus suffered and denied. They tell you put your trust in a method or person

and God will bless you with all the promises of scripture, yet without having to walk by faith as an alien and stranger in this world.

Dear friends, don't be robbed of knowing your heavenly father's love by the lie that life will be heavenly if my 401K grows just a little bit more, or that new job or promotion becomes a reality. Don't be robbed of knowing your heavenly father more by the lie that comfort and autonomy will give you peace.

The enemy of this world is making a concerted effort for you to not know God's love, therefore we need to be on guard.

We need to be on guard, but at the same time, we also need to take heart....For those in Christ, Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world. You have the Spirit of God to lead you to know the unique love of your heavenly father, which John defines in defined way in our next point.

God's love is unique in that it is not like the world's love. The world's love is often self-centered and self-serving, where God's love is self-sacrificing; yet we need to surrender to His kind of love.

Addressing his hearers as Beloved in verse 1, John eventually tells them in verse 8 and verse 16 that God is love. This phrase, only appearing in these two verses throughout the whole Bible, is John trying to give us a unique picture of who God is and what He is like. A predicate nominative is a word after an equative verb like "is" that gives fuller detail to the subject being described. There are three such expressions that John makes about the nature of God. "God is light" (I John 1:5) and "God is spirit" (Jn. 4:24) and "God is love" (I John 4:8,16).

This love of God is a unique kind of love that needs to be defined in our world today. We say that we love many things. I love my wife, and my children, but I also say that I love Blue Bell ice cream. In our world, marital love can even defined as primarily feelings of emotion. The tabloids are often quoting how one can fall in love and out of love.

In verse 9 John says, "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."

God - the holy one, in whom there is no darkness, who existed and enjoyed perfect intimacy and fellowship amongst the camaraderie of the Trinity since before time began, who by the power of His Word spoke into being all of creation - This God sent.

This God, Sent His only Son - Not passive or indifferent, but because of compassion, God took the initiative in a self-sacrificing way to do good on another's behalf that His children might be blessed to experience all that God intended for them - He sent His cherished only Son.

God sent His only Son, into the world - This beautiful creation, a breathtaking work of artistic expression, this radiant blue sphere spinning and teaming of life, including His crowning masterpiece - man, made in His image. This world, beautiful as it was, is where He chose to become flesh because the flesh he created was marred with the repugnant stain of sin and rebellion.

This God, sent His only Son, into the world - so that we might live. Charles Sprugeon said, "There is no light in the planet but that which proceedeth from the sun; and there is no true love to Jesus in the heart but that which cometh from the Lord Jesus himself. From this overflowing fountain of the infinite love of God, all our love to God must spring. This must ever be a great and certain truth, that we love him for no other reason than because he first loved us. Our love to him is the fair offspring of his love to us." We must surrender to this kind of love.

I met my wife Barat in June of 2001. Dating her was fun, being engaged was exciting, but choosing to be married to Barat is when our relationship truly blossomed like a flower in the spring. Intellectually I knew that I loved her. There were plenty of Emotions. However, it wasn't until I volitionally made a commitment to her that we were finally married. It was a volitional "I do, in sickness and in health, for better or for worse, till death do us part" commitment that allowed our love to grow. We must surrender to God and his love to begin a marriage with him, and then continue to surrender our hearts to his love for the rest of our lives.

A handful of years ago, a reporter from a Christian radio station was going around the country interviewing national ministry leaders. When he interviewed Dr. Bill Bright toward the end of his ministry, about founding the ministry of Cru back in the

1950's and about all that he had seen God do, he asked Dr. Bright where he thought the ministry was going, what he thought about ministry strategy, and what he was most proud of. Dr. Bright gave full and robust answers with passion and conviction. But when the reporter asked him live on air, what Jesus meant to him, Dr. Bright paused, said not a word, but broke into tears and wept, and wept, and wept. The interviewer had to close down the interview. Later the interviewer remarked of all the Christian leader he had interviewed, it was Dr. Bright who said the most about knowing the love of Jesus.

We have to pause and ask ourselves, "Have I committed my life to Christ? Have I moved past simply dating Him and said 'I do'?"

If you know the love of God, do you need to be reminded of His love? Whitney summarized it well the other day when he preached from I John 2 - busyness can keep us from experiencing the love of God. Repent from busyness by spending time daily reading your Bible. The Bible is God's truth to us that exposes the lies of the enemy. The beauty of the Bible is that it is not an instruction manual telling us how to walk with God, but the nature of the Bible is that it is a love letter from God to His beloved. Take time cherishing the love within.

As we surrender and experience God's love in our life, it will fill the wells of our heart to the point that His love will naturally overflow to others. Our last point is that....

God's love is unique in that it empowers us to love those in the world, yet we need to rely on His supernatural power to do so.

In verse 11, John concludes that if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. That word "ought" often has the nuance that we are under obligation to meet certain social or moral expectations. I ought to eat a little less sugar, I ought to exercise a good bit more often, I ought to brush my teeth in the morning before I interact with society..... Social and moral expectations. A cursory glance at this verse would have us think because God paid for the magnitude of my sins I ought to talk to that guy in the office that talks too much, spend time w/ that family member that is hard to be around, be kind to that person that betrayed me. The reality is when we think about the fact that those in Christ do have a new nature, we really should not sin

and love one another. It's Father's Day. As a father, I know that I ought be more proactive thinking about nurturing my kids instead of focused on what is going on at work. I know that I ought to seek to listen to my wife when she has had a hard day instead of trying to give solutions to fix her hard day. These are things that are expected and right to do for someone who made a commitment to love till death do us part.

The troubling part of this word ought is that we can miss that John begins this sentence with "Beloved". In that word, John is standing on all that he has been saying in the pervious three chapters. Because you know God, because you have a new nature, because Christ is your advocate to deal with your sinful flesh even as you are presently sinning...Beloved, you ought to love one another. The nature of this word is not one of performance. Because this has happened you better do this....John is saying that loving one another, loving those in our world, whether believers or not, is the natural thing to flow from being changed by Christ. That is why we ought to love.

Now for those sitting in the audience today, whether fathers or not, we all have this gnawing reality that we know we don't love the way that we should. Sometimes God's unique kind of love really does flow naturally from us, but the crushing truth is that sometimes it doesn't flow nearly as much as we think it should. For those who are troubled by this, I have good news. In fact, our Heavenly Father has really good news. He sent His only Son to perfectly love in the ways that we fall short. The obligation of God's "ought to" expectation of love has been fulfilled in Christ. Truly His love is a unique kind of love.

My earthly father has retired in my hometown in Indiana. He continues to surprise me with what he does with his time and talents, as well as the stories he shares. My father has many attributes that I want to emulate, one being that he often tells me that he loves me. I am so grateful for him and like him, I hope to communicate my love and acceptance to my son and daughters. As good as my dad is, he still isn't perfect. Our heavenly Father is perfect. Perfect in his Light, perfect in his Spirit, and perfect in His love - thankfully we will have all of eternity to discover and cherish His unique kind of love.