

# Advent 2017: Love - 1 John 4:7-19

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning. Open up your Bibles to 1 John chapter 4. So that's one of my favorite West songs as well.

! Unless I'm totally imagining this, the first time he ever sang that song for the kids, the bear song, was about 10 of us came back from camping that night, and a bear actually came into our camp, and I think it was kind of dedicated to that event.

But I chased the bear off. I think Daniel Swanson slept through the whole thing in his hammock soundly, so it was really fun. Maybe he woke up. He may argue later, but it was a great time for us just to gather around God's Word this morning.

As you know, as I said, we're doing Advent, and I have the candle of love today, the Advent of love. So just join me in a quick word of prayer.

Father, we gather this morning, as many are doing around the world, to celebrate Christ coming to earth, to walk as a man, and to live among us, and then to die a shameful death, to bring us life.

[ 1 : 17 ] And then raised from death, and now is seated at your right hand. And we celebrate the first event of his life, coming here, and being born as a baby.

So Lord, I pray that you would give us eyes to see and ears to hear. You would renew our hearts, our mind, our souls, to look at your love afresh this morning.

So Lord, help us. We will walk away unchanged and unmoved unless you move in us through your Word this morning. So we place that before you, and we ask that in Christ's name.

Amen. So we'll read our text first. It'll be in 1 John, chapter 4, and we'll read 7 through 19.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

[ 2 : 30 ] Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this, the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world so that He might live, so that we might live through Him.

And in this is love. Not that we have loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the repitiation for our sins.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.

By this, we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and we testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world.

Whoever confesses that Jesus Christ is the Son of God abides in Him and He in God. So we have come to know and to believe that the love of God has for us.

[ 3 : 48 ] God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in Him. By this love is perfected with us so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because He is, so also are we in this world.

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

We love because He first loved us. so talk about an immense topic, the love of God, how many misunderstandings there are about the love of God in the church and in the world, but also the Scripture has more than could ever be exhausted on just the idea of the love of God.

And it's important for us just to step back during this season and to think about superficial holiday kind of love that will be around us a lot, mainly from the world, but also in some churches.

There's a, I want to just mention some of this briefly because I think it demeans the glory of what the love of God truly is if we focus on these things and don't really focus on what God says about His love.

[ 5 : 19 ] But many of us, we, during the holiday season, we kind of take on a sentimental kind of love, an emotional kind of love that really just masquerades around as true love, but it's really not.

It's just the warm and fuzzy, gushy love kind of based solely on feelings and it's where we just, you know, we feel generous around this time of the year because it is Christmas.

I went to buy some firewood a couple days ago and the lady was trying to, she didn't really have like a set price on her firewood and she was just like, you know what, it's Christmas so I'm just going to give you a lot more for less, you know, just, but, you know, two months ago that would have not happened.

It would have been like a lot more money. So, it's just this kind of sentimental love that kind of hits people like it's, it is the season to be nice. It comes in the form of niceness to people and yet after Christmas this kind of good cheer sort of disappears and in, in truth, this sentimental love mimics compassion but it really is as silly as sending a Hallmark card to one of the poor diseased countries in the world and just saying we hope you get better.

That's about the gravity and the weight of that kind of sentimental holiday love that is not real and furthermore this sentimental love is really just trivializes real love and it breaks in the face of difficulty and obstacles.

[ 6 : 57 ] It's not going to survive and, you know, also this morning this very morning and tonight a lot of people will attend a church service for the first time or maybe the second time in the year Christmas and Easter and they're going to hear someone stand up and say something along these lines.

Christmas is a time to remember that God loves all people and we are all His children and He accepts us just the way we are. I've heard that a service many years ago and what they're really saying is that tons of lost people who are coming there, all they're hearing is God likes you just the way you are and you don't need to have anything changed in your life so they think that they are cool with God and they leave thinking God likes me.

See, I was told that tonight. Instead of saying yes, God loves you but He loves you too much to leave you in your sin and that you need a Savior. And so, many people that talk about the love of God are really total strangers to the love of God.

It's not just sort of some divine good-natured indulgence that a parent might have for a kid. It's very, very different. And we need to kind of draw a line and say that you know, sadly, tragically, all people are not all God's children.

In John chapter 1 it says, but to all who did receive Christ who believed in His name He gave them the right to become the children of God.

[ 8 : 40 ] So, in Christ alone do we have that idea of becoming God's children and until then we are hostile, separated from God. And so, though God does have a general care for all people created in His image, He has a special love, a special affection set upon His children that's very different from the rest of the world.

So, I want to kind of just define the love of God based on this. This is kind of a hybrid definition of J.I. Packer and Wayne Grudem's definition.

But, let's define true, biblical, godly love. So, when I say God's love, what does that mean? And here it is. God's love is an exercise of His goodness whereby He freely and eternally gives of Himself to others.

God's love is an exercise of His goodness whereby He freely and eternally gives of Himself to others. God's love love God's love is an God is unlike any other being in the universe and His love is so immense and infinite.

Scriptures say all through, I mean, I could just pick a hundred different texts to look at, but in Psalm 103, verse 11, for as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him.

[ 10 : 15 ] And then later on in verse 17, for the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him. It's such a magnificent truth we find in the Scripture.

And so using our text from 1 John, I want to make just really three points about how we can indicate what true love really is. And I stole these, or I borrowed them from Sinclair Ferguson, so I'll give them back to him later.

But these are really, really awesome indicators of what true biblical love is. Okay? So the first one, number one, to understand what love is, we have to understand the identity of the lover.

The identity of the lover. So if we look at 1 John chapter 4, look at verse 7, it talks about how for love is from God, and in verse 8, God is love.

Verse 16, so we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love. And so, each one of these points, I want to give you a principle to kind of further clarify.

[ 11 : 37 ] So we're talking about the identity of the lover. So here's the principle. The greater the lover, the greater the love. the greater the lover, the greater the love.

Real simple. So with that, kind of let your soul try to grasp that of there is no greater lover than the sovereign, eternal, infinite God.

No being in existence that has the capacity to love the way that He does, the immensity, the vastness. So, stay in 1 John, but just go one chapter before that.

Chapter 3 and look at verse 1. See what kind of love the Father has given to us that we should be called children of God and so we are.

So, this is an amazing verse I'd just like to talk about, but this is the attitude we should take when we're approaching the identity of the lover. Like, we need this idea of beholding the love of God.

[ 12 : 51 ] You know, the only illustration I can really think of with this is one that I shared a long time ago, but just indulge me. But when I went to the Grand Canyon in November 2014, I was with my friend Kevin, and some of you know him.

He can be a man a few words sometimes, and just a deep gruffy voice, and we were walking up on the Grand Canyon. We ended up hiking about 13 miles around it, and I don't know if you've ever been there, but it's pretty amazing.

You can spend, you know, a year, years just exploring all the stuff that is there, and we walked up on it, you're just kind of driving, and you go out and you walk, and the narrative just opens up to this immense, you know, glorious wonder of the world, and again, Kevin, at this point, man, a few words, he kind of just walks up and he just says, wow, look at that.

And if Kevin had been speaking in the Old English, which he would never do, he would have said, behold, the Grand Canyon. It means to like gaze upon, take heed of that, look at that.

And that is the language that John is trying to convey here, this idea that is like astounding as someone at the Grand Canyon is nothing in comparison to the one who made it and the glory of the love of the one who made it.

[ 14 : 25 ] So, see or behold, gaze upon what kind of love the Father has given. Some of the older translations are like better, has lavished upon us, that we should be called children of God.

So, another way to understand what the love of God actually means is to just look at the language. So, what kind of love is this? What sort? What manner of love?

And if you, people who like to study and go deep, the love word that's used here is agape, the highest form of love in existence.

So, it's not like a brotherly love. It's not necessarily even like a love that you might have for your husband or wife. It's much deeper than that. Since God, by his very definition, defines what love is, he alone kind of possesses this attribute of agape love.

That word was used very rarely in Greek speaking cultures and societies. It wasn't used a lot. It usually was associated with just some sort of divine love.

[ 15 : 42 ] But in the New Testament, it's used 320 times, which is magnifying that idea that this is a special, unique, other kind of love that God has.

That is self-sacrificing and unconditional. So it is not a type of human origin kind of love at all.

Agape, he has given this, he has lavished this freely, bestowed on this abundantly to us, the love of God.

So, something else to think about, this idea of the love of God, is to think about it in the form of just his attributes. God has many attributes, holiness, justice, goodness, mercy, love, but when you study the attributes of God, you need to sort of be aware that it's not just that God has goodness or has love, it's that he is goodness and is love.

He defines those things and they're very different the way I just explained that. You and I can have goodness, we can be good, we can be loving, but then, like many of us know, all that has to happen is the one has to blow a different way and circumstances get rough and then we are not so good, not so loving.

We change very quickly as our circumstances get more difficult. You ever heard someone say, you know, she used to be such a loving and kind person, but then she lost her job and now she's very

just upset and angry and depressed.

[ 17 : 31 ] We change, but the difference is, again, that God is his attributes. He is love. We've read that in our text twice. God is love.

And so his love for us is not worn out by our sins or by our indifference. It continues to be what it is. This love extends from the love that the Trinity possesses, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the love that they have together that then extends out to us.

I love that idea that I can't wait to, we'll eventually maybe do a series on John 17, the high priestly prayer. And I love it that Jesus actually says, I ask that those whom you have given me may one day be with me where I am to behold my glory.

Then he says, the glory I had with you before the world existed. It's this idea of like joy and contentment inside the Godhead before anything existed.

He didn't need us. Very complete, very joyful, very much love inside the Trinity. And if you look at our text in John, you see the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit mentioned in this idea of love.

[ 18 : 56 ] So is an extension of those things. The love of God is uninfluenced. What I mean by that is that there is nothing about you and I that prompted or attracted that love that he gave us.

And that might be hard to hear for some people. But it was something that he did simply because he chose to. Because it was in his nature to show love.

But he wasn't obligated to show love at all. There was nothing in us at all. We'll get to that in a minute. But that love is uninfluenced. It doesn't waver.

Think about the favorite John 3.16. Incredible verse. Incredible verse. But we often mistake this idea of God so loved the world to mean that God loved the world so much.

Like extend the O's on that. And that's not what it's saying. It's just they chose to kind of stick with the old English. Like God loved the world. And then back then you said well how so?

[ 20 : 10 ] Well he gave his only son. So it's this idea that it really magnifies God's choice to send his son. That he chose to send his son. That's how he loved the world.

And it's God's love is eternal. Jeremiah 31.3 I have loved you with an everlasting love. And therefore with love and kindness I have drawn you.

So that is the testimony of God's love. there is no greater lover than the sovereign almighty God. So we weaken in our love but he remains true and steadfast.

And that brings us to the second point. And that is the object of love. The object of love. If you look at verse 10 back in chapter 4 it says and this is love and it says not that we have loved God.

Just chew on that for a second. So here's the principle attached to this point. The lesser the object the greater the love.

[ 21 : 24 ] The lesser the object the greater the love. It is really easy to love people who are lovable. It is really easy to love people who are loving you in return and giving you a lot more back for what you give.

Jesus said if you love those who love you what benefit is that to you? For even sinners those who don't know God love those who love them.

It is a weak love. And so we have this idea that God had to come here and send his son to die for us because we were so worthy.

Because we were so lovable. Because he could not go on without us. And he had to send Jesus to die. And so what happens is me and the church have wrongfully turned God's love into an echo of man's value, man's excellence, man's worth.

Instead of seeing it as an affront to the glory of God and the holiness of God and rebellion against the greatest being in the universe.

[ 22 : 39 ] So he didn't have to come and save us, but he chose to. Right? Rebellious, ungodly sinners. So remember, the lesser the object, we are way down here, the greater the love.

When you magnify how great you are, you demean the love of God, is what I'm trying to say. When you understand what the Bible really says about who we were, as people separated from God, it magnifies the love of God.

Hard to love things that are unlovable, but he chose to do so. So that is the test of love. Hold your hand in verse John, but look over at Ephesians chapter 2.

Just turn to the left. Ephesians chapter 2. So many of us know that it's not hard to profess love for someone when circumstances are great, and when you feel like you're getting love in return.

But however, the true test of love comes when difficulty, hardship, and trials, and obstacles come our way. Are you going to love through that, or is your love going to vanish?

[ 23 : 53 ] And this is a picture of, again, the lesser the object, which would be us, the greater the love. So, Ephesians 2, look at verse 1. Very familiar text.

we were dead in our trespasses and sin, in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

stop. What is lovable about any of that? What is worthy about any of that? Nothing. He is explaining who they were before Jesus and really who we were.

We didn't love God, we were alienated from God. We were dead in our sins and we followed the world and we followed our flesh, the passions of our flesh and we walked in disobedience.

And then it says the result of that was we were by nature children of wrath. Nothing worthy about that. Verse 4 though, here's that, here's this idea explained.

[ 25 : 17 ] But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

By grace you have been saved. so when we pause to consider how truly wretched and unworthy we really are, and I know I don't deserve any good thing, and yet I still think I deserve it from time to time.

Like, in my right mind, I am a sinful man. Peter's words often come to my mind, like, when Jesus spoke to him in Luke for the first time, and he realized who Jesus was, and he said, go away from me.

I'm a sinful man. I'm a wicked man. Don't come near me. And Jesus then says, come here. You're going to be mine. And worked in Simon's life, often how I feel.

But this, again, this magnifies the love of God to understand that we were not lovable. Nothing attractive about us at all. But he chose to do it.

[ 26 : 32 ] And that brings us to the third point. So, how did he express this love? This number three, the expression of love. The expression of love.

So, we have the identity of the lover, right? The object of love, and then lastly and thirdly, the expression of love. And the principle for this is, the greater the expression, the more marvelous the love.

The greater the expression, the more marvelous the love. And there's no greater lover than God, no lesser objects worthy of love than us, and no greater echo of the love of God than the rugged, bloodstained cross of his son, Jesus Christ.

So, God's love paid the highest price, the life of his son to ungodly sinners. He gave that, freely gave that, paid the highest price he could pay.

I think some people were shocked when I was shocked years ago when a man asked me, so you know what God loves the most? And I was like, me?

[ 27 : 50 ] He loves me. And he was like, no. And I was like, oh my gosh, like, what are you about to say? And he's like, he loves his son. His son is the most precious thing to him.

And he willingly and freely gave the most precious thing to bring us salvation, though we didn't deserve it. He came and he paid the price for sin on the cross.

So, love is also expressed in like, how low are you willing to stoop for me? Right? Think about that. How low are you willing to stoop?

Humble yourself for another. Christ stooped unlike any other being in existence. He washed the disciples' feet for goodness sake.

And I hate feet. I could never do that in a million years. And so, he made himself, took on the role of a servant that was prophesied about in Isaiah 53, the suffering servant.

[ 28 : 55 ] Though he was worthy of all glory, he really was the king. He took on the role of a servant. And he even loved the one and washed the feet of the one who would betray him.

What incredible love that was. And there was no greater way that he stooped than coming in the incarnation and then in death.

In John 15, verse 13, it says, Jesus says this to his disciples, greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

And I want you to flip, I think this is the last place you're going to turn, no, 100 place, but Romans 5, again, one of my go-tos for this. Just read a couple verses just to make this point.

Romans 5, verse 6. And think about these three points that we've made about love as we read this. The identity of the lover, the object of love, and the expression of love.

[ 30 : 05 ] Verse 6, for while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. for one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die.

Again, it's easy to love those who love you, easy to love those who do good to you, not how we were with God. But then he says, but God shows or demonstrates his great love for us, and that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

So there's this idea of the expression of love. While we were his, you keep reading, his enemies, Christ died for us. Human love does not do that. Human love does not lay down their life for an enemy.

And not yet. That is what the Son of God did. He came and he stooped. When I was in Oakwood, I got to speak on Philippians 2.

I'll just read it to you, but talking about how Christ humbled himself, ridiculously humbled himself, scandalously humbled himself.

[ 31 : 16 ] Philippians 2 verse 5, he says, have this in your mind among yourselves, which was yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, the form of God, the morphe of God, he possessed all the divine attributes that God possessed, was by himself, very nature, God, did not count equality with God, a thing to be grasped, but he emptied himself by taking on the form of a servant.

The word form is used three times in these verses and this is the same one. He took on the form of a servant being born being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form.

He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Mind blowing. And he didn't waver.

A quote by C.S. Lewis on the love of God and all the stuff that we've been talking about really. he said Christ did not die for men because they were intrinsically worth dying for, but because he is intrinsically love, and therefore loves indefinitely.

God loves us, not because we are lovable, but because he is love. Not because he needs to receive, but because he delights to give.

[ 32 : 49 ] Sums it all up. for us. So, as we continue to think about these three things, just a few conclusions, we have to draw.

This demands a response, not just to store more head knowledge, but to respond to. We have to understand that. Here are a couple of things.

First off, if we really do know that we are saved, blood-bought, born again, children of God, let Christmas be kind of a reminder for these two things.

So, because God has so freely lavished his love on us, let us love him in return. Let us worship him and adore him. He brought salvation to us, delivering us from hell.

He's forgiven us our sin and our evil, canceled our debt. He's justified us in his sight, taking away our unrighteousness and giving us the perfect righteousness of his son.

[ 33 : 51 ] We are reconciled to him through the death of his son, though we were his enemies. And perhaps maybe even the greatest privilege, now we are given the privilege to know him and to be known by him and to have eternal life.

Jesus says in John 17 3, and this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. That is the privilege we have.

So, let this Christmas be a reminder that you don't need to look further than the cross to be a reminder that God loves you. Don't think, you're tempted to think, and I'm tempted to think, if God would just fill in the blank, then I would really feel loved by God.

There's no greater way he demonstrated that than the cross. None. So don't look beyond it, but sit there in front of it and gaze at it.

And so that kind of love, if we truly have been touched by it, will transform us, and it will cause us to love God in return.

[ 35 : 02 ] It's just the natural outcome. If we have been touched, we will love. This is what John is trying to say. If you don't have love, then you're probably not of God.

You have not known God if you do not love God. And very simply, obviously, the next response is because God has so freely lavished his love on us, and that we love him in return, we should love those around us, love others.

Jesus said, write, a new command I give you to love one another just as I have loved you. And John, back in 1 John, beloved, love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God, and anyone who does not love does not know God.

This is staggering to me because what he's really saying is you can't truly love someone unless you know God. Think about that. it means that a lot of people are walking around the day without Christ, who they have some kind of deficient love that they're giving to other people because it's mainly motivated out of what they can get out of it.

It's not the agape Christ-like love that we have experienced, but because we know God and have been saved by him, we can love people with that same love. He empowers us to do so.

[ 36 : 34 ] So, if we have been genuinely, truly saved by Christ, that will transform us in such a way that we will love others in return.

So, kind of ponder that. God's love transforms us from the inside out, and it's a natural outflow and a demonstration of his work in our lives.

So, in closing, just wanted to think about, as we ponder the love of God, I was reminded of a little section in one of C.S.

Lewis' book, Chronicles of Narnia and the Last Battle, where Lucy kind of peers into the stable that's on the hill, and she sees inside the stable another stable.

And she's reminded, she comes from our world, and she goes into the world of Narnia, but she says, in our world, too, the stable once had something inside it, and it was bigger than our whole world.

[ 37 : 38 ] Ponder that. The one who created the cosmos, who possessed all things, created all things, laid in a manger as a baby, humbling himself to come and save this defiant race, people made up of people like you and me, who aren't worthy of such a gift.

So, let us love him and adore him in return. So, allow your soul to take that in. And let's pray together, and I'm going to use Ephesians 3 as Paul prays for that church so they would understand the immensity of this type of love we have experienced.

May we have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Yes, Lord, I pray you would just give us the ability, the capacity to love as you have loved. love of God. And we thank you that though we were not worthy, not deserving of this love, you have chosen to lavish it on us and to bring us into your family.

So I pray that this Christmas time would just be another reminder as we need to be reminding ourselves every day of the great love that you have demonstrated.

[ 39 : 21 ] So Lord, allow us, please help us. We just don't want to remain as we are, we want to change, we want to love you and return and then turn around to a dark world to show that same kind of love towards both in word and in deed.

See us, Father, and we praise you for the amazing love you have shown us. In Christ's name, Amen.