

First Baptist Church Merritt Island

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So That Your Joy May Be Complete – a study of First John

The Love of God

1 John 4:7-12

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When I was in college, my dad took me on a mission trip to the Philippines. Dad served as the president of a mission organization that planted churches throughout southeast Asia. I was studying to be a pastor and I had two very important goals for that trip. I wanted to see the work of God in a foreign nation. And I wanted to buy a fake Rolex.

For a week or so, I traveled to churches that had been planted through my dad's ministry. It was life-changing. At the end of the trip, we had a couple days in Manilla, so it was time for me to get down to business. I went to a marketplace and the hunt began. I wanted to find the closest knockoff I could afford, but I didn't really know what to look for. Thankfully, I had a secret weapon – Uncle Phil. Uncle Phil was my dad's best friend. Before he came to Christ, he was a high-stakes poker player who had a large personal collection of authentic Rolexes. He sold most of them when he became a Christian so that he could give the money to the cause of Christ.

Uncle Phil could spot a fake a mile away. He knew what color face they made in each model. He knew what the band should look like. Most of all, he knew how the second hand was supposed to move. Since Uncle Phil was an expert in Rolex watches, he could spot a fake a mile away. He helped me find the most authentic-looking Rolex in the Philippines...for under \$30. And I wore a genuine fake Rolex back to the States and for the next couple of years, plenty of people asked me about it because it looked so real. But there were two people who were knew without a doubt that it was a fake. Uncle Phil and myself. He had spent enough time with the real thing to know the difference and he taught me what he knew, so now I could tell the difference.

The reason I thought about that old Rolex is because it's kind of like the context of 1 John. There were false teachers who were peddling a counterfeit Gospel to a group of believers who were struggling to tell the difference between fake Christians and the real thing. So, John wrote this letter to help the early church spot counterfeit Christianity. He teaches us the authentic gospel and the marks of someone who is genuinely following Jesus. And, in our text this morning, John says that an authentic follower of Jesus is characterized by the genuine love of God.

1 John 4:7-12

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 In this 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. 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. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

Clearly, John is calling us to love each other.

- 1 John 4:7 says "let us love one another..."
- 1 John 4:8 says "Anyone who does not love does not know God..."

- 1 John 4:11 says “If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

Like John has said multiple times already, genuine Christians should love each other. But, as I was studying for this morning, what stood out to me is that the focus of this text is God’s love for us not our love for others. The word love occurs 15 times in this paragraph and 9 times it is in reference to God’s love for us.

Even the way John refers to these believers is in light of God’s love. He calls them “beloved” in verses 7 and 11. The word “beloved” simply means “ones who are loved.” When John calls us to love each other, he intentionally draws our focus away from ourselves and each other and puts the spotlight squarely on God. Why would he do that? He tells us why in verse 7.

1 John 4:7-8

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

The reason we should love one another is because love is from God and is a characteristic of those who are born of God. This is one of those verses that is easily twisted by people who know just enough of the Bible to be dangerous. Almost everyone we know loves someone. Nearly every parent in the world loves their kids. And nearly every kid loves pizza. Does that mean pretty much everyone is born of God? What’s going on here?

In the ancient Greek language – the language the New Testament was originally written in - there were **four words for love**.

- Eros described the romantic love between a man and a woman.
- Storge described the affectionate love between people who were close to each other, like members of a family.
- Philia described the love between friends and brothers. Philadelphia is a compound word. Philia and adelphos, which is the word for brother. That’s why Philadelphia is the city of brotherly love. Just ask Eagles fans who threw snowballs at Santa Claus.
- But there was another word that was used for love that didn’t have a distinct definition. It was the word agape. For hundreds of years, it was rarely used and sort of existed as a generic word for love that didn’t have a distinct meaning. Until Jesus came and followers of Christ adopted the word agape and used it to describe the unique love of God.

And that’s the word John is using in our text. John isn’t talking about the common love that is used to describe the love parents have for their kids or the affectionate love friends have for one another. He’s talking about the unique love that only comes from God.

That’s why He can say that not only does love comes from God but, even more, God is love. That isn’t saying God is only love. God is holy and righteous. God is truth and life. God is all-powerful and Sovereign. He isn’t just love. But every aspect of God’s character is marked by love. For instance, His holiness is a loving holiness and His love is a holy love.

That’s the love that John is talking about – the unique love of God. And that’s why he says that whoever loves is born of God. The only way to love with God’s love is to be born again to new life by the grace of God through the work of Jesus. That’s the point John is making. He is calling us to trust in God’s love and look to Him for live – not roll up our sleeves and get to work trying to love people in our own power. We’ll come back to that in just a few minutes. But, for now, that gives us our big idea for today.

BIG IDEA: THE LIFE GOD GRACIOUSLY GIVES TO US IS CHARACTERIZED BY THE LOVE GOD UNIQUELY HAS FOR US

Genuine Christians are characterized by the love of God given to them and flowing through them. That's the point John is making. The way you can spot a true follower of Jesus is by looking for evidence of God's unique love. If God's unique love is there, that's a sure-fire way to know that God is at work. So, in the time we have remaining, let's focus our attention on what John has to say about the unique love of God.

THE UNIQUE LOVE OF GOD

1. GOD'S LOVE UNIQUELY PURSUES THE LEAST DESERVING

1 John 4:9

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world...

1 John 4:10

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son...

The natural love we have is tied to qualities we see in others that are deserving of our love.

- When we talk about our love for our spouses, we list their virtues – “She’s beautiful and honest and kind.”
- When we talk about our love for our children, we look for ways to celebrate how loveable they are – “She’s so well-behaved.” “He’s a wonderful baby. He’s already sleeping through the night. I love that kid.”
- When we talk about our love for our friends, we want to validate our friendship with them by affirming the good things we see in them – “He’s a great guy. He works hard and never says a bad thing about anyone. If I ever needed anything, I know he’d do whatever he could to help.”

It would sound so weird to hear someone talking about their best friend as though they didn't deserve to be a friend at all. “Man, I really love Jim. He’s the worst. He lies and steals from me all the time. I’m pretty sure he got me fired from my last job. For years, he has actively worked to turn everyone we know against me. I love that guy. I’ve been saving up for a few years to buy him a new house.” That’s crazy talk. By nature, we love things we find loveable. But that’s not why God loves us. He loved us when we didn’t love Him.

Romans 5:8 says that God demonstrated His love for us while we were still sinners.

Ephesians 2 says God had great love for us even though we were disobedient and following the rebellion of the world against Him. As we were running away from God, He came after us. He sent His Son on a mission to us. Why? For God so loved an undeserving world.

Here’s what that means for you today. It means no matter who you are or what you’ve done, you are loved by Almighty God. Perhaps there are things about your past or your personality that make you think you don’t deserve to be love by God. Listen friend, that’s the point. We don’t deserve the love of God. But he loves us anyway. There’s nothing you could ever do to make God love you more and there’s nothing you could ever do to make God love you less. God’s love uniquely pursues the undeserving.

2. GOD'S LOVE UNIQUELY PAYS THE HIGHEST PRICE

1 John 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.

Though God loved us in spite of our sin, God's love could not overlook our sin. Since God is a good judge who loves justice, He cannot overlook sin in any way. Since God is perfect and holy, nothing sinful can exist in His presence. For that reason, our sin separates us from God. That's the great problem with this world today. Sinful humanity is separated from a Good and Holy God.

But in His great wisdom and love, God had a glorious plan. He would send His only Son to become a man in the person of Jesus Christ. As a man, Jesus was able to serve as a representative for all mankind. He was able to stand in our place and face the judgment we all deserve. That's what a propitiation is. It's a sacrifice that pleases God.

The reason Good Friday was good is because it was the moment in time when the perfect Son of God died in the place of undeserving sinners. It was the day God dealt with our sin by punishing Jesus as our substitute. It was the day Jesus offered Himself to God the Father as a sacrifice that would pay the penalty for the sin of the world.

Romans 5:8

God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Friday morning, I was meditating on the crucifixion of Jesus. I read the account of Christ...

- being mocked and beaten
- tied to a whipping post and tortured by Roman soldiers
- dragging His cross through the crowds who were gathered to hate Him
- laying His body down upon the cross so that metal spikes could be hammered into His flesh
- hanging between heaven and earth
- rejected by people
- forsaken by God
- suffering unimaginable pain from the hands of men and even greater pain from the infinite wrath of God for the sins of the world

As I prayed over those passages, I had to admit that I couldn't imagine the suffering of Jesus and I couldn't make myself feel what I should rightfully feel about the suffering of the Son of God in our place. But then a thought came into my mind. I have a son. He's my only son. I would gladly give my life for him, but I would never give his life for you. As I thought of the sheer terror of my son suffering the fate of Jesus, it was crippling. I had to stop. That's far too high a price to even let it linger in my mind.

Yet, before the foundation of this world, God knew this would be His plan. He knew the cost of creating a world that would turn away from Him in sin. Yet, He created us anyway. Why? For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. What love has ever paid a higher price than the price God paid in His love for you?

3. GOD'S LOVE UNIQUELY PRODUCES THE GREATEST GOOD

1 John 4:9

In this 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.

Genuine love desires what is good for those we love. For instance, parents make countless decisions for their kids based on what they believe is good for them. It's good for our kids to eat healthy meals and get a certain amount of sleep and learn the difference between right and wrong. Those things inform the decisions we make about mealtime and bedtime and how we discipline. Genuine love desires what is good for those we love.

And that's just a shadow of the unique love of God. God's love not only desires something for us, but it also produces something in us. And it isn't just good, it's the greatest good. God's love produces life. And that's not just ordinary life. Verse 9 says it's life through God's Son. And this connects us to Easter.

The Bible says we are spiritually dead in our sin apart from Christ. But through the work of Jesus at the cross, God has made a way to not only forgive our sin but to restore us to a brand-new kind of life in Jesus. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead raises us up to a new kind of life in Christ.

1 John 3:14

We know that we have passed out of death into life...

Hear the good news of the Gospel of Jesus. CHRIST THE LORD IS RISEN TODAY...AND SO ARE THOSE WHO TRUST IN HIM. And what is that resurrection life like in Christ? Resurrection life is eternal life.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Jesus gives us life that lasts forever. A life of eternal pleasure and immeasurable joy in the presence of God. Because of Jesus, we will never perish. When this life on earth is over, our lives will have just begun. Listen to what John records about the end of time in the book of Revelation.

Revelation 21:4–5

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

And that includes you. Because of the work of Jesus, we have no reason to fear death. Resurrection life is eternal life. But the life of Christ in us isn't just eternal.

Resurrection life is abundant life.

John 10:10

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Abundant means to be more than ordinary...to abound...the picture is one of a bowl that is so full, it's overflowing. That's abundant life. That's the good thing God's love produces in us as we trust in Jesus - A life that is overflowing with the life of Christ in you. And that brings us all the way back to the beginning. The reason love is evidence of those who are genuine Christians is because to be a

Christian means God's love is producing the greatest good in those who trust in Him. He is making us more and more like Jesus through the power of His Spirit in us.

THE LIFE GOD GRACIOUSLY GIVES TO US IS CHARACTERIZED BY THE LOVE GOD UNIQUELY HAS FOR US.

That's why we need Jesus. We need Him to save us from our sin and to raise us to new life by His resurrection power so that we can love others with the Love of God. And the good news is that we don't just need Jesus, we have Him because God so loved this world – He so loved you – that He gave His only Son so that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have eternal life.

Are you trusting in Jesus today?