

## **The Example of Love**

### **I John 4:7-12**

Last week we looked at John's challenge to the church to test everything. We saw that false teachers or false teaching will come and try to lead us away from God or the truth. The only way we can be on guard is to test everything that comes our way. We are not to embrace things simply because they have been labeled, "This is what the Lord God has to say." But a true word from God will confirm itself through Scripture.

We saw biblical examples of the Bereans and the Ephesians and how they didn't take someone's word for it, but checked up on everything that was taught to them or prophesied to them.

We saw that the Spirit of God always points us to Jesus. Prophecy or teaching must always have the central theme of salvation through Jesus Christ. We saw that we can have victory over false teachers and teachings by relying on the ability of the Holy Spirit within each of us.

We also saw that false prophets always tell people what they want to hear. In relation to us false prophets simply have to say something that we want to hear and we may find ourselves in danger of being led astray. That is why it is so important to weigh everything against God's word, especially since our own hearts and conscience can deceive us.

The words of the prophets and apostles are words to confirm God's commands, to encourage us to grow in the Lord, to identify the workings of the enemy, and make us aware of the dangers that seek to destroy us. Therefore, we must be students, researchers, and scholars of the Word of God.

Today I want to continue on and look at **I John 4:7-12**. John now wants to come and define God's love for us and how we should love others. He says:

*Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is born of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God – for God is love. God showed how much he loved us by sending his only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love. It is not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love has been brought to full expression through us.*

John begins by telling us to love each other. But not only does he give us a command he then goes on to tell us that the reason we should love each other is because love comes from God.

## 1. Are You Tapped into Your Source of Love

God doesn't simply expect us to go around and love people without some understanding as to what love should look like or even having some type of experience of this love.

We live in a society where love has been distorted. Love is viewed as this object of acceptance based on sex, material provision, or even met expectations. Many people don't know what true love is because in their experience they have found that love is not unconditional. Some relationships are performance based, acceptance is granted because of how one performs.

Some relationships are built on a introverted point of view where we are bound only to certain people, finding ourselves trapped with the inability to disagree or say no. Some relationships are built out of a one up, one down mentality where age, spirituality, wealth, or numerous other conditions cause people to look down on another.

The world doesn't know what love is. They can only catch brief glimpses of love before the human need for stuff of acknowledgement then comes into play.

It is so important for us to learn from our source of love. His ideas of love are pure in motive, they don't discriminate, they are available to all. John tells us in verse 7 that love is of God and then in verse 8 tells us God is love. Love is so much a part of his nature that He is inseparable from it. God oozes love from every part of his being. **Psalm 86:5, 15** tells us:

*O Lord, you are so good, so ready to forgive, so full of unfailing love for all who ask your aid.*

*But you, O Lord are a merciful and gracious God, slow to get angry, full of unfailing love and truth.*

Just think of what God offers us, in spite of our condition, or rebellion, or need to satisfy ourselves: He is ready to forgive, willing to help those who ask, full of mercy and grace, slow to get angry and full of unchanging, unending, unconditional, always available love and truth. Paul spoke of God's love in **Ephesians 2:4-5**:

*But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so very much, that even while we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead.*

The words "rich in mercy" here is defined in the Greek to mean an always available, always plentiful, sympathetic connection, full of passion. We aren't simply talking about a speratic urge to be lenient here or there. But we are talking about a continuous never ending supply of love.

*There once was a man who worked in a small town as the operator of a drawbridge on a river. A train track ran across the bridge, and the operator's job was to keep the bridge up when no train was coming so that the boats could pass underneath. When a train approached, he was to blow the whistle and let down the bridge. One sunny Saturday morning, the man brought his seven-year-old son along to work with him. The boy could play along the river, skip rocks on the water, chase butterflies, or even try to catch a fish or two. Shortly before noon, a passenger train was due to come through the area. The man began to make preparations to let the bridge down, he noticed that someone – a small child – had somehow climbed over the guardrail next to the bridge, and was playing at the very spot where the bridge would come down. As he look closer, he realized with horror that the child was his son. In desperation, he yelled out his son's name, but the sound of the approaching train drowned out the screams. He knew he had to make a quick decision. If he lowered the bridge now his son would die. But if he didn't, all the people on the train would die as the train plunged into the river. He barely had time to think. As he screamed in agony, the man thrust forward the lever to lower the bridge as the train arrived. His son died instantly. And as the train passed by, the people just smiled and waved as they passed by the man in the control booth, with his head bowed low, oblivious to what had just taken place.*

Isn't that what God did for us?

Can we agree this morning that maybe some of us need to start attending the School of God's love and nurture as opposed to continuing to function in the love that we have learned from fallible relationships? If only we could see ourselves, feel for ourselves, and want to help ourselves how God wants to.

If only we could have some type of understanding as to what it is like to give up our only son for the sake of someone else's salvation. If only we could understand or fathom what it would be like to see people ridicule, ignore, or even plot to destroy our child who has great wisdom and truth to speak. If only we could place ourselves in God's shoes and experience the complete fullness of love.

But we can't be God. We will never fully understand the situations that He had to go through. But we do have a model to follow. We can see that John is telling us here first, that we must love each other. The more we love each other then the more we begin to understand God, and the more we understand God, the more we will begin to love as God loves us.

It all begins with an action on our part. But the more we get into it the more we become different in our approach to love than the world thinks it should be.

Every aspect, every decision, every provision is done by God with the goal of love. Even the words of rebuke and judgement are done out of love in hopes that people will turn from their rebellious ways.

My question to you this morning is, "are you tapped into the source of love" this morning? Are you learning what it really means to love people? Are you changing your ideas of what love has been to what it should be? God is love and we need to learn love from Him. **Ephesians 3:17-19** tells us:

*I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts as you trust in him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love really is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is great you will never fully understanding it.*

In the NIV the idea of being grounded or established is mentioned in verse 17 of this text. This term grounded in the Greek has the idea of a foundation for a building. Paul is telling the Ephesian church that God's love is the foundation of our faith. He also tells us that he wants us to understand just how incredible and indescribable God's love really is.

In the Adam Clarke's Bible Commentary, the author tells us that the width of God's love is so big that it encompasses the whole earth. The length of God's love is a testimony of how it reaches from past eternity through future eternity. The depth of His love is low enough to reach fallen man, no matter what condition he may be in. And the height of is love is able to bring fallen man into the presence of God as a co-heir with Jesus Christ.

Are we tapped into this incredible, complete and perfect love, that knows no boundaries, so that we can learn and strive to model God's love to the world.

John continues on in I John 4:9 and tells us that God showed his love for us by giving us salvation and eternal life.

## **2. God Showed His Love.**

We talked about this topic a couple of weeks ago when we looked at **I John 3:16-20**. Our love for each other cannot simply be talked about but must be shown just as God has shown his love to us. **John 3:16-17** tells us:

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it."*

God did not simply have affection for us, but realized that because of his love for us, he had to help us. It is the same with our relationships in the church, that as we realize how much love God has for us, we then realize that we need to respond not only to God, but to others as well.

But notice in I John 4:10 that now John makes a statement of fact.

### 3. REAL LOVE

He says, "This is REAL LOVE" or, this is the ultimate expression of love, and he then goes on to explain it to us. He says that love is not a result of God responding to our overwhelming love for him or our deserving of this gift, which we all know we have totally fallen short, but that God responded simply out of his nature. In **Romans 5:6-11** we read:

*When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, no one is likely to die for a good person, though someone might be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's judgement. For since we were restored to friendship with God by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be delivered from the eternal punishment by his life. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God – all because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us in making us friends of God.*

Paul tells us here that perhaps someone would die for someone who is exceptionally good, but the reality is, in contrast to God we fall way short. In fact, we were enemies of God and yet he still chose to send Jesus on our behalf.

Real love is not something that is looking to get something out of it. It is not conditional or requiring of a met standard. True love is an action that doesn't expect people to respond, or people to feel obligated to respond. True love is an action in itself. An act of kindness, mercy or grace that then gives freedom to the recipient to do with it whatever they please.

I remember the song that was done by the music artist STING, that stated, "if you love someone, set them free." It is true, love doesn't place conditions on people, but allows them to be able to respond out of their heart. God sent his Son to die for the whole world, but the whole world doesn't respond. God is not a dictator. He gives us a free will to decide for ourselves who we will serve. True love is the result of a choice and not obligation.

May we have real love within our own lives. A love that grants people the freedom to respond how they want. Yet a love that we show with no strings attached, no expectations placed on other people, but a expression of freedom by both the giver and the receiver.

God loves this world of people no matter what they do or how they respond. He hopes that they will turn to him, yet he grants the free will for them to choose.

John continues on in I John 4:11 and tells, since God has shown us true and unconditional love we should do the same.

#### **4. A Love Of Mercy**

Jesus used many parables and within these stories talked about the whole issue of showing love. In **Luke 10:36-37** when Jesus was talking about the Good Samaritan with a religious expert he asked:

*"Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?" Jesus asked. The man replied, "The one who showed him mercy." Then Jesus said, "Yes, now go and do the same."*

How many of our relationships show mercy. How many of us are willing to give up our right to judge or ridicule, looking past the fault of others? That is what God's love looks like, and that is how our love for others should be as well.

When talking about the servant that had just been released of his debt to the king, Jesus tells how then the servant went out and demanded that someone that owed him money be thrown in jail. We read the king's response to this servant in **Matthew 18:32-33**:

*Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you.'*

How many of us today would be called an evil servant? How many of us willfully refuse to show mercy for others, as God has shown mercy to us. The term evil servant here can be translated from the Greek as one who is "malicious in character, or one who brings on pain and anguish." Our lack of mercy does create pain for other people. Paul told the Colossian church in **Colossians 3:13**:

*You must make allowances for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.*

Finally, this morning John tells us in I John 4:12 that if we love each other as God has loved us then we will be the full expression of God's love to the world.

#### **5. We are to be The Full Expression of God's Love**

As we evaluate our lives this morning, can we say that we are the full expression of God's love, or is there somehow that we can do better? People's idea of what the God of Christianity is like today is because of what they see the church doing or in what manner they behave. What do they see here at Redwood Foursquare? What do they see in your life. The more we feel we miss the mark, the more we need to learn.

## **Conclusion**

So, this morning John is challenging us to learn from God the whole concept of love. Love is probably very different from what we have learned in a fallible human society. As we begin to understand to what extent God loves us, it will change the way we love others.

God showed his love by sending Jesus Christ to help us in a way that we could not help ourselves. But this was not simply an emotion or reaction, but God's love is real. His love is something that doesn't expect anything in return. It is simply the demonstration of his character. That is who he is.

God granted us freedom to choose. He didn't put conditions on his love, but has made his love available to all. Does our love for people give them the freedom to respond to it however they want. Or do we put conditions on our love for each other?

God showed a love of mercy, giving up his right to judge or condemn those who will respond to it. How many of our relationships are characterized by mercy? Jesus called merciless people evil, malicious in character, or one who brings pain and anguish. Do you bring pain and anguish to your relationships?

Finally, we must understand that God wants us to be the full expression of his love. People will think of God according to how they see us live and love each other. Many have been turned away from the faith because of the ridiculous behavior and unloving responses of those who claim to follow God.

This morning may we not only learn from our example of love, but may our own lives be examples for others.