

The Love of God at Christmas

1 John 4.7-14

The theme of God's Love is a year-round theme, but it is especially appropriate for Christmas. Imagine if we experienced the love of God at only certain times – if only on certain days or at one season of the year! We would build our lives around those hours! But here we have a love too big, too great, too wonderful to pen up to one time or season. The love of God fills all in all, and the thoughtful Christian will run to him frequently.

Our text over the next three weeks is going to be the same – 1 John 4. And I hope you can see how this is a repeated Christmas matter in chapter 4.

Verse 9 – By this the love of God was manifested – God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him.

Verse 10 – In this is love – He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Verse 14 – The Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world!

Next week we will consider this great gift of love in the Son; is there any great gift possible than that which the Father has freely and fully given to this broken and fallen world?

And the following week we hope to consider what it means to receive this gift, and the love that is brought about in our hearts and lives, who understand the message of Christmas and live in it.

But today we begin at the top, with the love behind the gift, the love of God Himself; the love of a God who says that He IS LOVE!

John loves these simple and profound statements. Earlier, God Is Light and God is Life to His people. But the best is saved for this chapter.

We say that 1 Corinthians 13 is the love chapter; and it is truly wonderful. But this takes us to God's love in a way that is unlike any other passage in the Bible. 1 John has the word "love" appear 36 times; and 21 times in this 4th chapter alone!

And nowhere else in the Bible do we find these three little big words – God Is Love! And here we find it twice!

How glorious to learn and know that God is love! That the Creator of this world, your Creator and Sustainer, has this unique personal quality.

This is the first point of our message today – do you think of God as love, for you should.

What we think about God is the most important thing about us said Tozer. And if the God who comes into your thinking is not love, then he is not God!

Love is not only to be found from God or even in God. He does not merely show love or possess love, which would be amazing in itself.

Look among all the pantheon of the ancient false gods, and you will not find any god who loves man.

But open to the most quoted verse of the Bible and read it for yourself about our God – that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.

The God of Scripture loves his creation; his lovingkindness is over all his works. But as we said, God does not merely show love, or have love – He IS love!

Love is his attribute – it is what God is. God does not merely have certain qualities; no. He is His attributes. God **is** love, God **is** holy, God **is** righteous, God **is** good, God **is** might, and so forth.

Our shorter catechism describes God as a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, justice, holiness, goodness and truth.

He is wisdom – infinite wisdom, eternal wisdom, unchangeable wisdom!

He is love – infinite love, eternal love, unchangeable love!

Infinite love! A God without limits, is limitlessly love!

Eternal love! God's love is everlasting is a repeated message of the Psalms – some 40 times it says, 'the lovingkindness of the Lord is everlasting'.

He who is without beginning or end, has said I have loved you with an everlasting love. How? By loving you himself!

God's love is true, faithful and unchangeable – not loving one day and not the next, not fickle or dependent on anything other than himself!

God is love, the same yesterday, today and forever.

Yes – Love stands out uniquely in the great constellation of God's attributes.

How can we possibly reach such things! Or little arms can never get around this ocean!

John Edie of Scotland wrote in his book, *Divine Love*: “To know the power and depth of the love of God, surpasses the limits of created intellect. It has a height and we cannot climb it; a depth and we cannot explore it; a breadth and we cannot grasp it; a length and we cannot compute it. Men may fancy what they cannot express and feel what they are unable to describe; but on this momentous topic inability attaches to heart as well as tongue; to thought no less than to language.”

This is even more unreachable when we try to understand that God is love. It does not say, God is loving, but God is love.

We try to be loving. We try and often fail and have to confess that we are not loving always and that we are selfish, unkind, rude and cold sometimes.

We should say to ourselves – “I want to be loving all the day long.”

But what does it mean for a creature like men or angels to “Be Love”? We are to imitate God's love, and yet here we seem to be at a loss. We have to put love on like a shirt. But God is love! That is his nature. Will our nature be love in glory? Can you imagine only love proceeding from your mind, your heart, your thoughts, your life?

That would be heaven indeed, wouldn't it? Or as Jonathan Edwards called it, "Heaven: A World of Love."

Well, we will have to leave behind this first point then as a giant, infinite, eternal ocean in our sky, and begin to look at our second point – how the Father's love is always self-moved.

Here is another part of God being love that we can't entirely grasp.

You and I love because of other persons or things around us.

When you go shopping for clothes or shoes or food, you are choosing things because of their worth to you. You love that coat, or you love those boots, or you love that kind of noodle over another.

But imagine for a moment if you were a being who could create what you love, and love what you create?

The God who is love loves in an equally divine way, a Godlike way.

His love is not dependent on the creature, on us; He is infinitely above us in every way, and will he depend on us for him to love us?

No – his love is free to us, gracious for us, and sovereign.

Verse 10 says: "Not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son..." God's love is always before us and above us.

Many reverse this: God loved me because I first loved him – I first turned to him, I first trusted him, I first received him, I, I, I, I!

But drop down in your Bibles there and read verse 16: "We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love..."

Again, the famous 19th verse – ‘We love, because He first loved us.’”

God’s love is not conditioned or based on us or our circumstances.

We are so prone to read his love to us – his smile or his frown – in what is going on in and around our lives. If things go well, he loves me; and he does not when things go poorly.

But here are two huge pillars of God’s love which grow out of His being self-moved, independent of us, when it comes to showing love to his people.

One is that his love is, like himself, unchangeable. It does not fluctuate; it is not like the ocean that rises and falls.

John Blanchard observes: “There is nothing the Christian can do to make God love him more, or love him less. God’s love for his people is infinite and unconditional.”

Dear friends, remember you were enemies to God, and that is when He was moved by His love to love you. Paul wrote ‘while we were yet sinners, while ungodly, God showed forth his love.’

Now that does not change when we embrace Him and His love for us! There is only a ‘how much more’ now that we are reconciled. And that can never be a ‘how much less’ now that we believe!

Why we go from God loving us unconditionally before we are saved to loving us conditionally afterwards, is a strange but common lie we believe.

But I said there was a second great pillar here of God being self-moved. And that is what has been alluded to already – God loves everlastingly.

Jeremiah 31.3 has him saying: “I have loved you with an everlasting love.”

God’s love is eternal for our future – he will never not love us to all eternity; His lovingkindness is everlasting will be repeated forever and ever and ever!

But God’s love is eternal for our past as well. God began to love you before you were you! From before the world was made, God elected you, predestined you, chose you!

If that doesn’t take the choice of God’s unconditional love OUT of our hands, I don’t know what can or will!

Ephesians 1 says: “In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of his will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.”

We read in 1 John 4 that the Father’s love was manifested to us in His giving us His Son – that is the theme of our next message, the measure of His love in such a gift as Jesus is, the Son of God.

But consider this – that He gave us His Son before the foundation of the world. He is the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. He loved us before the foundation of the world!

There is a sense in which God has never not loved you, as His decrees are without beginning, and His decrees are grounded on His love!

Let these two pillars then stand firm in your hearts: God is love, and His love to me is based on himself who is love. He loves me unchangeably – He is self-committed and self-moved in His love to me. He loves me eternally – He has always loved me and will always love me – not because of me but because of his love!

Now it is right here that we want to go forward and see the God who is love, who is self-moved in His love to us, manifesting, showing His love to us in the gift of Jesus to us. Verse 9 – the great Christmas gift – God has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world by His cross.

But that is a whole other message, waiting under our tree for next week.

I want us to pull another truth from this passage with which to wrap up our message today.

We read here that love is from God, God is love, God manifested his love by sending his Son, and God so loved us, in 7-13.

But in verse 14 we read: ‘We have seen and testify that the FATHER has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.’

God was certainly a father to His OT people; but that title Father becomes THE prominent name of God when the Son is sent in the NT.

The great OT name of God was Jehovah – that name, the great I AM, encompassed all the blessings and promises of God to his people as the loyal, faithful, loving God of Abraham, and Moses, and David.

The symbol of the OT church was the burning bush and the I AM who redeems out of bondage.

But in the NT, this more familiar and loving title is brought into greatness and goodness for us – God our Father!

John began this letter with the warm welcome mat – come, join us in this fellowship with the Father and the Son. There the doors were swung wide open to all, to me, to you.

At the beginning of chapter 2, he insists that we believers have Jesus Christ the Righteous One as an Advocate with the Father.

And the beginning of chapter 3 tops them all: ‘Beloved, what manner of love has the Father bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God; and such we are!’

The love of God through the Lord Jesus Christ brings us into fellowship as children of God, forgiven and accepted into His household.

There is no higher title in all of the world, in all of the universe, than to be called the children of God!

God’s love, the Father’s love has been brought to us at Christmas time, to bring us home.

The Son of God left that home and came down to us – because the Father loved us so much as to send Him – so that we would be brought to know, and have, and love the Father with the Son He gave.

There is no love like this; there is no substitute for this saving love of God that leads us to a life of love to Him as our Father!

We all want love; we want be loved; we even want to be loving people.

A multimillion dollar study was conducted by the Federal government recently to see if people preferred to be loved than to be hated; to be loving rather than to be hateful, and the results were almost unanimous that people preferred love to hate.

One of the last acts of Governor Jerry Brown is to have a bill passed that says Californians are in favor of love rather than not love.

Who would be against love? Love is of God, right?

John wrote earlier in 2.15 that to love the world means the love of the Father is not in you.

Men naturally love the world, the flesh and the devil; and what a poor substitute is that trinity to the love of God, of the Son and of the Spirit!

Do you know the love of God? Do you know the God who is love? Do you know the Father who sent the Son?

Oh come to Him today! He has done so much for you, and manifested so freely His love to you, and welcomes you right now to turn to His love, his grace, his salvation from all your sins!

So free is his love towards you that all you need do is to call upon the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved! And loved!

You can know the Father today; you can know eternal Light and Life today! You can know the God who is Love today!

Amen!