

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Manifesting Perfect Love, Part 1

Scripture: 1 John 4:7-12

Code: 62-34

First John chapter 4 is our text for tonight. We are going to enter into the joy of the Lord by learning this passage. John says, "These things I write unto you that your joy may be full," back in chapter 1 verse 4. And understanding the last section of 1 John 4 certainly contributes to our joy. It's a section about perfect love. It's going to take us, I think, a couple of weeks to work our way through it even though some of its truths are familiar to us.

Let me begin a long way, if I might, from 1 John. By way of introduction and setting our minds in the proper perspective to embrace this text, let me take you way, way back to the sixth day of creation. "On the sixth day of creation, God said, 'Let us make man in Our own image.'" Genesis 1:26. Now since God is the eternal spirit, being made in God's image is not physical. It has to do with the immaterial part of us. The root of the Hebrew word for image, *tselem*, seems to mean to carve out. Let us carve out man, let us shape man to Our image, literally. In other words, let's replicate ourselves in man. Let's shape him and form him to be reflective of us. Man then was created in an exalted fashion. Man was created to be like God.

And what does that mean primarily? Primarily that means man was created for inter-personal relationships. The Trinity was always a Trinity, is always a Trinity, will always be a Trinity. God by nature exists in fellowship and relationship within the Trinity. Let's make man, God said, with a capacity for relationship because as 1 Corinthians 11:7 says, "Man is the image and glory of God." This is not true of anything else in the creation. No other creature that God made did He make in His image. In the entire time/space universe this is true only of humanity. We know that man shares biological features with animals and even plants, with cellular structure, with even the element of atomic particles. And while we share in the biology with the rest of the creatures since they were all designed by God to live in a common environment physically. We are not like them. Man cannot ascend from them. He is not a highly evolved ape. He was at the very outset the first man made, made transcendent to all the rest of the biological creation because he was made in the image of God, he was made for something no other life in the universe was made for, and that is relationships.

When you talk about man created in the image of God and what makes up relationships, you talk about self-consciousness which only man possesses. Man has the capacity to understand himself. Man has the capacity to think abstractly because that's necessary in relationships, to appreciate beauty, to feel emotion, to be morally conscious, to reason, to acquire wisdom. All of that so as to

have the ability to personally connect, personally relate to other people and especially to relate to God, to be able to love others and to love God. The core then of the image of God can be summed up with the words "personal relationship." Man is made with a capacity to love, to love others and to love God. And within the frame of that love there is fellowship, care, sharing of thoughts and attitudes and experiences that makes love the richest of all human experiences. The image of God then is the capacity for personal relationships which come down to giving and receiving love.

God Himself has never existed in a single lonely solitary fashion. He has never existed in isolation, He has never existed in some cut off form. He's always existed in the fullness of a family-like reality; Father, Son, Holy Spirit. The Father has never been without the Son, the Son never without the Father, neither ever without the Spirit, the Spirit never without either. The amazing mystery of the origin of the *amagio dei*(??), the human personality is the Trinitarian essence or substance or reality of God. And God so designed that He would develop man not only to be able to relate to his fellow man but to be able to relate to Him. This still resides in the human heart, all these millennia after creation, we still long to love and be loved in all human relationships as well as the relationship with God.

In fact, as you probably are aware, the human heart cries for love more than anything else. It's the theme of more songs, more plays, more books, more films, more...more literature in general, more poems than any other thing. We long to love and be loved. We long to find that perfect love. All the forms of human discourse tell us that because we have been made in the image of God for that. We want so much that perfect love relationship. And that understanding draws us all the way from Genesis into 1 John 4. In 1 John 4:7 through 21 which is the rest of this wonderful chapter, John presents for us a study of perfect love. It is not hard to understand, it unfolds with beauty and simplicity and yet with depth. We're going to work our way through it and be enriched greatly by it.

But let's just kind of pick up the themes that are here. Perfect love is the theme. Verse 12 ends, "His love is perfected in us." Verse 17, "By this love is perfected with us." Verse 18, "Perfect love casts out fear." End of the verse, "The one who fears is not perfected in love." Four times here in those three verses we read about perfect or perfected love. This is what everybody is looking for, everybody is longing for and no one will ever find outside a relationship with God.

I think this adjective sort of tops my list, this adjective "perfect." The Bible talks about brotherly love, it talks about unfeigned love which is love without hypocrisy. It talks about abounding love. It talks about serving love, and a number of others. But I think the best of all is that the Bible presents to us perfect love.

Now how are we to understand that word "perfect"? Well it is from the verb *teleioo* which simply means complete, whole. It basically means to carry out something to the max. That word is used by Jesus when He was dying on the cross and had come to the end, and said, "It is finished," He used a form of *teleioo*, *te telosti*, same verb, to say it's complete. And what He was saying was, "What I've just done can't be added to. What I've just done can't be improved on." And that's the kind of love we're talking about. It's a love that cannot be added to. It is a love that cannot be improved on. It is the perfected love with all the completeness that can only come from God. It is that kind of love, and this is another time and another sermon, but that kind of love that is defined and laid out for us in that wonderful chapter called 1 Corinthians 13, the love chapter. What is here pledged to the true Christian is perfect love, that is the experience of the love of God in all its fullness, all its completeness, experiencing a love to which nothing can ever be added. The fullness of God's love is available to us. And that's what John is telling us here. Perfect love is the legacy that God has left to His children.

In Paul's epistle to the Romans, he says in chapter 5 and verse 5, "The love of God has been poured out," the idea is fullness, lavishness, "within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." When you were saved, a floodgate was opened and the love of God was poured out into your heart. The fullest expression of that love granted to us comes when we are obedient to the Lord, chapter 5 of 1 John verse 3, "This is the love of God that we keep His commandments." We know and experience the full richness of that love in obedience. Go back to chapter 2, 1 John 2:5, "Whoever keeps His Word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected." The perfect love of God comes to us as a gushing stream, the perfect love of God is then perfected in us as we keep His Word. You want perfect love, it's only available from God through Christ. You want to experience the perfection of that perfect love in your life, it's only available through obedience to His Word.

We're here not talking about then a love that is attached to mystical experience. That's so important. We're not talking about a love that is attached to emotional sentimentality. We're talking about a love that's connected directly to salvation and sanctification, a love that is connected directly to knowing Christ and obeying Christ. Knowing Christ grants us that love, obeying Christ allows us to enjoy the fullness of it. That's what we're talking about when we talk about perfect love.

Now the details of how perfect love works in the Christian are given here in the text of 1 John. You can look again at chapter 4. Here we find the details of how perfect love functions or operates in the Christian and why it is so important. Now if you've been with us in our study of 1 John now for these many, many months, you know that this is not the first time John has talked about love. In fact, it is really the third time that he's actually gone into a rather significant treatise on the subject of love. Back, for example, in chapter 2 verses 7 through 11, the theme there was love. "Beloved, I'm not writing a new commandment to you but an old commandment which you've had from the beginning.

The old commandment which is the word which you have heard. On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. The one who says he's in the light yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there's no cause of stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness and doesn't know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes."

There John discussed love as a proof of true fellowship. If you're really in the light, really in the fellowship, it will be proven by your love. It's evidence of being in the fellowship.

Then over in chapter 3 you'll notice verses 10 to 14. "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious. Anyone who doesn't practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who doesn't love his brother. For this is the message which we've heard from the beginning that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil and his brothers were righteous. Do not marvel, brethren, if the world hates you, we know that we've passed out of death into life because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. We know love by this, that He lay down His life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue but in deed and truth. We shall know by this that we are of the truth and shall assure our heart before Him." A whole section on love.

First, love is the proof that we're in the fellowship. Second, love is the evidence of our sonship. Now we come back again in chapter 4 to the third time that John discusses love, as he recycles back through it, this time he identifies it as that perfect love which is not just a proof of fellowship, not just an evidence of sonship, but a manifestation of the presence of God in us. First time he's saying it means you belong to the community of believers. Second time it means you belong to the family of God Himself. Third time it means God dwells in you. And so, typical of John in this epistle, cycling back through the same great moral proofs and doctrinal proofs of salvation, but always with a richer and deeper purpose. And so John comes for the last time to this theme, with greater depth, greater breadth, greater insight. The chapter 2 section was a few verses, the chapter 3 a little more, and the chapter 4, more yet.

And again I remind you that what John does throughout this epistle is give tests by which we can know we are truly saved. This whole epistle was written so that we might know we are truly saved. Some of the tests are doctrinal. What is your view of sin? What is your view of Jesus Christ? Some of the tests are moral. The moral tests have to do with obedience and love. Those are the evidences and they come together. If you love, you obey. If you obey, you demonstrate love.

So with that sort of as a background, and the reminder that John never gets enough of love, we turn to this section of Scripture. Verse 7, "Beloved, let us love one another." Orthodox doctrine is not sufficient to prove true salvation. Orthodox doctrine is not sufficient evidence of conversion. True salvation will demonstrate itself in love. Beloved, he says, "Let us love one another." Verse 11, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." Verse 21, "This commandment we have from Him that the one who loves God should love his brother also." This is both a test and an exhortation. We love but we're to love more. We have been given the love, it's been literally poured out, the sluice gates of God's love have been opened and gushing into our lives has come this capacity to love and we need to take that opportunity, that capacity in the strength of the Holy Spirit and love to perfection.

He's talking to believers here as indicated by the opening designation "beloved," *agapetos*, divinely loved ones. Those whom God loves, let us love one another. Habitually here the verb *agape*, *agapaois* the love of the will. It's not the love of emotion. It's not physical love, friendship love, it's the love of the will. It's the highest and noblest. And it's habitual. We've heard this injunction already from John, we hear it again. We are to love one another. We are commanded to do that with a love of the will. And we're going to see as this unfolds all that this means, but let me just remind you that this level of love is the love of self-sacrificing service. It's a love basically that is granted to someone who needs to be loved, not to someone who somehow is attracting that love. It is love that chooses to love because there is a need to be loved, no matter how unattractive the person might be. Who chooses out of that love sacrificial service because there is a need for that service and an opportunity for that sacrifice.

Now, we are then to love. This is consistent with who we are. John has already said it is proof that we're in the fellowship. It is evidence that we are sons of God. And here he's going to say it is a manifestation of the life of God in us. And John's going to give us six reasons why we should love. And the first one hits the issue right on target. Six reasons why we are to love.

Reason number one, because love is the essence of God. Love is the essence of God. And he is clear about the transition. "Let us love one another...verse 7...for love is from God and every one who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love, does not know God for God is love." Love is from God, verse 7. God is love, verse 8. What he is simply saying is let us who are the beloved of God who belong to God love because that is consistent with who God is.

In chapter 1 verse 5 we learned that the essence of the nature of God is light. And also that God is life. That is reiterated again in the third chapter, verse 1 and following. God is light. We can talk about that light as manifest truth. And it is also manifest life as we pointed out when we went through

that section. God is light and God is life. And here we find out God is also love. If we then know God, if the life of God is in us and the light of God is in us, then the love of God is in us. If we walk in the light, if we possess the life, we have received the love. And it's very clear, "Let us love one another, for love is from God." Clement of Alexandria said, one of the early church fathers, simple statement, very profound, "The Christian practices being God." We are to bear the reflection of God. We are to adorn the teaching of God. We are God's children manifesting His nature. We manifest His light, His life, His love. We literally reflect God.

Wasn't it Alexander the Great who had a soldier who bore his name who was unfaithful in duty and demonstrated cowardice? And Alexander called him in and said, "Either change your behavior or change your name." And I think that, in a sense, is what John is saying here. If you're going to call yourself a Christian, if you're going to say you are God's and you belong to God and you truly are His, then conduct yourself as He would, with love.

He goes on to say, "Everyone who loves is born of love." We're not talking about human love. We're not talking about temporal love. We're not talking about sexual love, or human affection. We're talking here about this transcendent love known only to those who are His, about this perfect love, love to the max which the world never, never, never knows. You are to love because He is the giver of that love. And to everyone born of God is granted that love. If you are born of God and you know God, then you have this love. God is the source, isn't He? He is the giver. Everyone...go back to verse 7 for a minute...Everyone who loves is born of God, has been begotten, perfect tense, past action with continuous results, of course. Everyone who loves is giving evidence that they've been born of God. To be born of someone means to share their nature. If you have been born of God, then the love of God will be demonstrated through you. If you know God in that intimate way, if you possess the life of God, if you've been born of God, you have the capacity to love, you do love, you will love and the injunction is to love perfectly, as perfectly as possible.

And the reverse in verse 8, "The one who does not love doesn't know God, for God is love." If you don't love, it's evidence that you don't know God. I mean, look at your life. The Gnostics, the religionists of Jesus' day and the days of the Apostles in the New Testament, they knew a lot about God but they didn't know Him. And you could look at their theology and say they couldn't truly know God because their theology was wrong, but you could also look at their lives and say they don't know God, they don't have that love that comes only from Him. God by nature, end of verse 8, is love.

It's more than God loves, it's God is love. It's so important to understand this. God and love are interchangeable in one sense, and yet in another sense they're not. And I want to point that out. There are people who have said, "Love is king." There are people who have said, "Love is the only god I worship." That's not what this is saying. In the Greek, God has the article, love does not. THE

God is love. That is the definite emphasis on God is love. It does not mean love is God, you can't go back and forth. Love does not define God, God defines love.

The human view of love is imposed on God all the time. You hear people say, "Well, if God is really a God of love, how can this and that...and this and that...be the way they are?" But God defines what love is. He's not subject to human definition. God is love. That even explains creation. Why would God create a world which brings Him so much trouble? Answer: if God is love, God does not desire to exist in Trinitarian aloneness. He creates objects to love and by whom He will be loved. It even explains human volition, human choice. God has designed that sinners love God not apart from their will, though by His power. Men are not robots, they are pled with to love Him. The greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And so God is love by the highest and loftiest expressions of the human will, obviously supernaturally aided by Him.

The love of God, the fact that God is love explains providence. Because God is love, He fills this world with evidences of that love in all the wonder and beauty of life. And, of course, it explains redemption. If God was only Law, He would leave me to the consequence of their sin. The moral law would operate, the soul would die, eternal justice would damn the soul. But God is love and so He seeks and saves and provides a remedy for sin. The fact that God is love explains life after death. God doesn't force His presence on those who don't love Him. He provides it for those who do. And those who enter into the presence of God forever, to enjoy His presence, will be those who desire that above everything. God is love.

I know that's hard to understand for some people. But your view of love can't define God. God says He's love and God defines what that love is. One writer said, "Look at the world around us. History has its long tale of man's inhumanity to man. Spain had its inquisition. Britain, it's Atlantic slave trade. Germany, it's gas chambers. Russia it's Siberian labor camps. The world is still swept by fear and lust and greed and tension. Nature too seems twisted. Babies are born deformed. They inherit diseases and tendencies to insanity. Ours is a world of preying animals, parasites, viruses and deadly bacteria. The Bible itself raises the question, it records tyranny, cruelty, mutilation, eyes gouged out, hands lopped off, deceit, licentiousness, war. Not only war, but God-sent war. Even Assyria, one of the cruelest nations of history is called the rod of God's anger. Is God love? Easy answers...he says...could not possibly be right. We must realize we're all children, we are fools, we are self-conceited, stiff-necked rebels who will get everything wrong unless we are willing to give up telling God what He should be like and what He should do," end quote. He's right.

God is love, that is what the Scripture says. That is what is true. And God defines what love is. He defines it by His kindness, His generosity, His goodness and His redemptive grace. All that those difficulties tell us is what sin has done and they provide a background for us to understand the

greatness of God's love. God is called the God of love.

When you think about God's love, you can think about it in a general sense. I wrote the book called The God Who Loves and it's been a whole book kind of describing God's love, so I won't go into all of that. But there is a universal love of God. There is a sort of unconditional indiscriminate unlimited love of God which is extended over the world. Titus 3:4 speaks of God's love for mankind. In Matthew 5 Jesus said, "Love your enemies as your heavenly Father does." There is a love that God has for the world. He is, as Paul says, "The Savior of all men, especially those who believe." But there's a sense in which He shows love even to the unregenerate, even to those who ultimately will go out of His presence forever.

How is that love manifest? Common grace. The world is a beautiful place. The sun shines on the just and the unjust, the rain falls on the just and the unjust. God's goodness pervades the world in which we live.

There's another way God manifests His love on a temporal, physical level and that is compassion. God expresses throughout history pity and compassion and tender-heartedness toward man that causes Him to withhold judgment. Every sinner should die at the strike of the first sin, right? "The wages of sin is death." Common grace, compassion indicate the general unconditional love of God.

A third way in which it's expressed is the myriad of warnings that are given to sinners. The Bible is filled with them..filled with them, warning about what is coming. All the warnings of the Bible are evidences of the compassion of God. God finds no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

And fourthly, by extending the gospel offered to the ends of the earth. The light that lights every man that comes into the world, the truth of God which can be known by every man so that if they don't live up to the truth that they've been given, they're without excuse, Romans 1. And then He sends His ministers over the face of the earth to tell the story of the gospel to every creature.

You look at common grace, you look at the compassion of God, you look at the warnings in the Bible, you look at the extensive way in which God has mandated the gospel, "Go to the ends of the earth and be preached to every creature," and you see the all-encompassing general universal love of God for man. That's the expression of His nature. He is by nature a loving God. That love has its limits in the sense that it doesn't transcend this life.

There's another kind of love in which God loves His own, this is a marvelous love. Turn to John 13, it needs to be understood as distinct and this is a wonderful parallel to John's epistle. John 13:1, "Before the feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He should depart out of

this world to the Father," Jesus is aware now, this is the passion week, this is the upper room, this is the night that Judas goes out to betray Him. He knows all that. But the next part of verse 1 says, "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them." And then it says, "To the end." Probably not the best translation. "To the uttermost, eternally." Really, the best *eis telos*, same word as *teleioo*, perfect love, He loved them perfectly...He loved them perfectly. The God who is perfect love, loves His own perfectly and perfect love then is defined as that eternal love which God lavishes upon us. He loved us, literally, into perfection. The song says, "The love of Jesus, what it is, none but His loved ones know."

And so, God is love, back to 1 John 4:8. It's His nature to love the world in a limited sense, I say unlimited in the sense that He loves all the world the same way, but limited in its effect. He loves the world through...demonstrated through common grace, compassion, warnings and gospel opportunity. That love is temporary. It is temporal, earthly and only for this life. And in the next life, there will be the judgment and wrath of God. On top of that though, His love for His own is that perfect love, that forgiving love, that blessing love, that life-giving love, that perfect love. That is the love that is celebrated in the epistles of the New Testament. For example, in Ephesians 2, "God being rich in mercy because of His great love with which He loved us." It is that great love that caused us when we were dead in our transgressions to be made alive together with Christ, by grace you have been saved and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace and His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. The love that He has for humanity He shows them while they are here. The love that He has for us, He shows us while we're here and when we enter into eternity and forever. This is the God of love. He is our God. He dwells within us.

"Let us then...John says...love one another. Love is from God and if we have been born of God," and that is to say His life is now in us, and if we know God in this intimate way, then we will demonstrate that love. "The one who doesn't, doesn't know God." Because God is by nature love. We're going to know a love that God has for His own. And that's why we are commanded to love one another. Beloved, inside the fellowship, inside the family, among those who know God's presence in their lives, we are to be characterized by love.

So the first reason that we are to have this love is because it is the nature of God whose life we possess. Second reason, we are to love with this perfect love not only because it is the nature of God to love, but because this love was manifest by Christ. This love was manifest by Christ. John moves into verses 9 and 10 and says, "By this the love of God was manifested in us that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Obviously great salvation verses, probably committed to memory by many of you.

God who is by nature love, God who has taken up residence in us and flooded us with His love is the God who expressed that love so magnificently, so gloriously in Christ. God's love became supremely visible in Jesus Christ. Let us love, he says then on the one hand, because we share the love of God in sharing the life of God, and let us love because of what we've seen God do in expressing His love. "By this," verse 9, "the love of God was manifested in us that He sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him." If God was so disposed to manifest His love that way in Christ, should we not manifest the love that He's given us to others in the same spirit of sacrifice?

There have been many manifestations of the love of God, of course. But the preeminent one is the gift of the Son of God, that God sent His only begotten, His *monogenes*, His unique Son. No greater gift, this is God's unspeakable gift, sent Him into the world in the incarnation so that we might live through Him, so that we might be the recipients of eternal life. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. He sent Him to cover our sins. God's free spontaneous love in sacrificing His Son is the model of love for us. God gave His Son for our sins. What he's saying here is, you've not only been given the love, you've been given the model of how that love functions in selfless sacrifice.

Now we could go through all the details of the doctrines of salvation, but you're familiar with them. God with me, for a moment, to the word "propitiation," in verse 10, "propitiation." This word was used back in chapter 2 and verse 2, "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins." We already made a rather extensive study of that word. If you want to dig a little deeper, you can get the tape on that message. This is an interesting and important term.

In pagan writings this term, *hilasmos*, was used of appeasing an angry God. It's a term that means to placate, to appease, to satisfy. A related term, by the way, used in Romans 3:24 to 28 refers to the Mercy Seat in the Old Testament where on the day of atonement the high priest went in and poured the blood of the sacrifice on the Mercy Seat and appeased God, satisfied God. To propitiate God means to placate God, to satisfy, to appease His holy just requirement for sin. God said, "I will accept blood shed and poured out on the Mercy Seat as a substitute, as a satisfaction for sin," because it pictured the final ultimate and only satisfaction, Jesus Christ. And so when they poured out the blood on the Mercy Seat, the Mercy Seat became the place of propitiation, the place of satisfaction. It was one and the same as propitiation. Jesus became the propitiation, the final and complete and full propitiation, God sending His Son, taking the life of His Son to satisfy His just requirement, to appease Him, to placate His holy wrath against us for our sins. God does bear wrath against sin. That wrath can only be satisfied in the death of Jesus. He then is the Mercy Seat. He is the atonement. He is the propitiation for our sins.

And that is the message in the Old Testament of Isaiah chapter 53 that is so hard for the Jews to understand. Isaiah 53, "He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities, the chastening for our well being fell upon Him and by His scourging we are healed." Verse 6 then, this wonderful verse, "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each one of us is turned to his own way, but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." The Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief, rendering Him as a guilt offering because it was His own good pleasure. Second Corinthians 5:21, "He who knew no sin became sin for us." Galatians 3:13, "He was made a curse for us." First Peter, "The just for the unjust." And so, God makes the extreme sacrifice, sending His Son in our place. You've seen the example of what love is, that's it.

Verse 11, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought...what?...to love one another." We are called to this love because we have been given the capacity to love by the very nature of God dwelling in us. We have been called to this love, having that capacity because we've seen the model of that love. Greater love has no man than this, said Jesus, that a man would lay down his...what?...life for his friends. This love is about sacrifice. This is so missing in Christianity in our day. It's all about me, me, me, me, me, fix me, make me happy, make me satisfied. It's not about Christ and it's not about others. Beloved, we have seen the model, we have seen the example. You never need to ask the question...what does it mean to love somebody else? It means to make the sacrifice.

Go back to chapter 3 verse 16. "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." That's it. No one who has truly been to the cross, no one who has really stood there and seen God's love displayed in which God would take His holy, beloved Son and slaughter Him, as it were, under the fury of His wrath under the weight and the guilt of all the sins of all who had ever believed, no one has ever stood there and comprehended that kind of sacrifice and truly possessed the life of God and then gone back to a life of selfishness. If you have, you don't know God. You are not begotten of Him. Our ability to love comes from the life of God in us. Our duty to love is demanded by the immensity of the sacrifice of the Father in the giving of His Son. That love is our standard and we understand the cross because we couldn't experience salvation without understanding it.

Listen to what Ephesians 5:1 and 2 says, "Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love." You want to know how to love? Imitate God. And then he goes on to say, "And imitate Christ, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for you." God gave up His Son and His Son gave up His own life.

There you have it. The model of love is sacrifice. So we are to love one another because God is the source of love and we bear His nature and thus we have literally been flooded with that love. And we

are to love one another because Christ is the manifestation of the Father's love and Himself the great example of self-giving love.

Let me just give you a third reason briefly. We are also to love because love is our testimony...love is our testimony. Look at verse 12. "No one has beheld God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us." No one has beheld God at any time. No one has ever seen God. Why is he saying that here? Why is he bringing that up. He's simply pointing up the fact that nobody can see God, so how are people going to know of His power and His glory if we love one another? God abides in us, He's perfecting His love in us and thus He's putting Himself on display. That's the point. If we love one another, God is on display. By this, Jesus said in John 13:34 and 35, shall men know that you're My disciples if you have...what?...love for one another. Don't go out and witness about Christ unless you are manifestly loving one another. The unseen God becomes seen in the love of believers. When we love, as we should, when His love is perfected in us, we reveal that He abides in us. Our love is evidence of His indwelling presence and it becomes the revelation of that presence to others.

God didn't just give us love, He gave us an example of love. And then He made love the way in which He discloses Himself to those who could never see Him. You, if you are a true Christian, have the capacity to love, you have the example to love, and you have the responsibility to love, cause that's how you prove you belong to God. That's how you express His love in sacrificial service to others and that's how you witness to the watching world. Love then becomes core to our Christian experience.

And if you're looking at your own life and you're wondering whether you are a Christian, do an inventory on expressions of love, sacrificial love, on behalf of others and manifest love seen and recognized and known by a watching unbelieving world. There are three more and we'll save those for next time.

You know, going through the epistles of John is such a rich challenge, but in some ways it's so frustrating for the preacher because the Apostle Paul has all this very sequential linear reasoning and you stick with him. John keeps introducing these vast subjects and circling back around them and it provides almost limitless opportunities for tangents, to go back off and pick up things and you sort of have to resist that. Just the uniqueness of John, but in the end what he says is so simple and so clear and so straightforward and so enriching to us. More next time.

Father, we know that Your perfect love is in us, but not yet perfected in us. It can be perfected in us, it can be brought to some maturity, some completeness when we love one another, when we love one another manifestly by sacrificial service to other believers and when that love is visible to a world

that otherwise can't see You. How can we say that You live in us if our lives are not transcendently manifesting Your love? May we put it on display everywhere that we might enjoy that perfect love which You've given to us. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).