

# (1 John #25) God Alive!

by J. Glyn Owen

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*As Christians, we are duty-bound to love one another, because God lives in us and His love should be expressed through us.*

**Duration:** 35:39

**Scripture:** John 4:11

**Topics:** "Resurrection"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher, John, discusses the importance of love among Christians. He emphasizes that love is a test of true faith and that every Christian should love their fellow believers. John explains that God has chosen various ways to reveal himself to humanity, such as through the burning bush, the pillar of fire and cloud, and ultimately through Jesus Christ. He concludes by stating that if we love one another, God dwells in us and his love is perfected in us.

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## Transcript

We have come in our studies in the first letter written by the Apostle John to a passage, a paragraph in the first epistle in chapter four, which begins with verse seven and proceeds at any rate to verse twelve. The divisions are not quite clear here, but it certainly goes on as far as verse twelve. Now, in this particular paragraph, the Apostle John is applying one of his three tests to professing Christian people.

There were those who professed to the men and women of God, and it was doubtful whether they really were. They had divided from the Christian church, set up a little affair of their own, and they were deviants doctrinally, and in many other ways. Now, one of the tests that John is applying is this test of love.

In a nutshell, he says this, every Christian man or woman must love his fellow Christian. Now, he gives us many reasons for that, and in this particular passage he will give us some. Now, we've been looking at this paragraph, and we've seen, first of all, how genuine love proves the divine paternity.

He who loves, says John, abides in God. God is in him, and he is in God. You see, this love is a special love.

It's not erotic love. It's not sexual love. It isn't even the kind of love that obtains between fellow countrymen.

Neither, indeed, is it the kind of love that obtains generally between parents and children, or children and parents. That is a circumscribed love for those who are so much like ourselves. This love is of a special order.

It is the highest form of love. It is agape. Now, says John, if you love like this, it means that you are a child of God.

And, on the other hand, if you are a child of God, then you will learn to love like this. He goes on to tell us in this paragraph that this love has only been once in history, properly and fully and adequately expressed. Namely, in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In him, the vast love of God himself was expressed. Expressed toward God and expressed toward man. But now, in the passage before us today, the two verses before us today, we have a third strand here of teaching.

John here, in verses 11 and 12, reminds us of the duty that is ours to love one another, and of the kind of ministry that we are expected to perform by loving one another. Now, let me read, then, verses 11 and 12 only. Beloved, says John, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwells, or can I give you another translation, God lives on in us. And his love is made perfect in us.

Now, this, then, is our theme this morning. Love and its contemporary ministry through the Christian community. Love can perform something in this world.

You will notice that there are two main themes in these verses, and I want our division this morning to take that very obvious line. First of all, God's love for us makes it a duty incumbent upon us to love one another. Beloved, says John, if God so loved us, we ought to love one another.

Now, I don't know, I guess it's true of every preacher of the gospel. Whenever you preach about a theme like this, you tend to believe and you tend to think, well, everybody knows this, everybody's familiar with this, and from the very word go, well, it doesn't excite us. You see, this is one thing that shows how very far off been we are, and how out of real fellowship with God.

We were talking about a mass crusade of some kind this morning, a moral crusade or an evangelistic crusade. We could elicit all kinds of enthusiasms, and there are many kinds, but when we come down to talk about the nitty-gritty of Christian love between Christian and Christian, believer and believer, brother and sister in Christ, a sad thing is we think it's not exciting and not important. I want to suggest to you that there is hardly anything in the whole biblical record which is more vital and more important for you and for me this morning than precisely this injunction.

If God so loved us, then we ought, says John, there is an ought about it. There is a moral imperative that emerges out of that fact that we, if we're Christian, and he's talking to Christians here, we ought to love one another. And I address this first of all to myself as I'm privileged to speak to you good people this morning, but I would not have any other Christian in the congregation evade the issue.

My friend, this is a word of God for you as well as for me. Don't miss it. Don't hide behind any facade.

This is a word of God to every Christian man and woman here this morning, and I believe God wants us to hear it. Addressing those then who are Christians, the apostle now presses home the sheer necessity of our loving one another. He's done it before, but he's adding something this time.

I'm not going to go back over the territory we've covered, but I'm sure those of you who have been with us on Sunday mornings previously will remember, will realize as we go on, that John is adding something here. There's always a new dimension. He repeats himself, but in so doing, he's climbing a staircase.

He's getting higher and higher in the realms of truth. We'll find that he's doing here, doing that here today. Now, the kind of love that John is concerned about we have been recognizing, particularly last Lord's Day morning.

There are three features to it. Agape love is, as it is demonstrated in the Lord Jesus Christ, it is a love that is directed even towards the unworhiest. Not simply towards people that we like, but towards people we don't like.

Love is directed even towards the unworhiest. As we saw last Lord's Day, people who are even dead in trespasses and sins, people who are repulsive in their evil and rebellion and their mode of living. Love is directed towards the unworthy, the unworhiest.

A second feature is this. It seeks the highest of all good things for the unworhiest, and the highest is this, eternal life. A life of sharing with God.

A life of the quality and of the dimension of God's own life. A life that is capable of fellowship with God here in this world, and then beyond death itself in the world that is to come. It's eternal life.

And then this, the third feature about this love is that it is prepared to give the costliest treasure in order to procure the highest for the lowest. God gave his only son, and he gave his only son out of love, out of agape, out of the condition of his heart, for God is love. Now, that's the love we're talking about.

Seeking the highest for the unworhiest at the costliest price to ourselves. The next thing I want you to notice, and it is stressed in this context, is this. This love is represented for us in this context as something that is characteristic of the three persons of the Trinity.

Now, I want to stress this for this reason. See, love is not a hobby of the Godhead. Somebody died recently in Britain, in the UK, and there was a notice in a column in the paper that her hobby was religion.

Her hobby was religion. Now, unfortunately, there are many people whose hobby is religion. They don't live.

It's not their life. It's not what they live for. I want to say to you that it isn't a hobby of God to love.

God is love. The Father is love. The Son is love.

The Spirit is love. The whole Godhead is involved in the business of love. In verses 8 and 9, we are not only told that God is love, but also that it was expressed in a gift which was the costliest of all, the giving of His Son.

The Father's love was expressed in the giving of His Son. So, the Father is love. The other side of that same truth is this.

The Son expressed His love in receiving the Father's commandment and becoming man and dying for us. No man takes my life from me, says Jesus. No one takes my life from me.

I lay it down of myself. This commandment have I received of my Father, but I nevertheless lay my life down of myself. So, the Son is love.

And when you come on to verses 12 and 13, you will see that the Spirit is love. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in him.

How does God dwell in him? By the Spirit. And then in verse 13, Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he has given to us of the Spirit, and the fruit of the Spirit is love. Now, I have no time to expound that at any length this morning, but I want to get it across.

The whole of the Godhead is involved in love for one another within the Godhead, for the church is the church, and for the whole world. God is love. So then, there are two lessons already evident.

First of all, the whole of the Godhead is involved in this business of agape, of love. And the love in which the whole of the Godhead is involved is this kind that we have considered, seeking the highest for the unworthiest and prepared to pay any price. That is what we are talking about.

Now, that brings us to the third strand here. Love ought to be a principle of life in those who are children of the Father, redeemed by the Son, and indwelt by the Spirit. You know, there is a logic here which shuts us in a corner, and we cannot wriggle out however clever we are.

Because the whole Godhead is love, and a Christian is related to the Father as his child, to the Savior as his redeemed, to the Spirit as being indwelt by Him. Because I am a child of God, because I am purchased by the blood of Christ, because I am indwelt by the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, then I must be a lover. Now, who among us can wriggle out of the logic of that? Now, if you only salute the Lord Jesus Christ as a sort of good man, well, all right, you do not know anything about this.

But I tell you, if you are born again of the Spirit of God, if you are washed in the blood of Christ, if you are indwelt by the Holy Ghost, then you are duty bound to love every other Christian man and woman in this wide world as God loved his people. There is no ingenuity that can get us out of this involvement and this duty. Something has gone wrong, and something is desperately wrong when I can look at another Christian and not love him for Christ's sake.

And now let's examine John's reasoning here a little more. How is it, or why is it that we must love one another? Can I take just one thread here? First, God who loved us in our sinful and lost condition lives in us. Lives in us.

God lives in us. You know, this is a phenomenon in the Christian experience. God is alive in us.

If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. And one token of the new creation is that we have the Spirit of God dwelling in us. God in us.

Christ in us. The Father in us. The three statements are combined in Scripture.

God in us. Now, insofar as God, who is love, lives in us, it is only logical that he should express himself as he would naturally express himself in terms of love. Or let me put it to you like this.

God dwelt unquestionably in his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Now, this is something that we all agree as Christian men and women. God was in Christ.

Jesus of Nazareth was no mere son of Mary. God was in him. He was the Father's only begotten.

Right. What was the Father's attitude towards the church as he lived in Jesus Christ? Now, I'm bundling together a lot of things that might need further elucidation, but let me put it like this. God loved the whole church in his Son.

Now, whatever your theology, if you're a Christian at all, you have to believe that. When the Lord Jesus Christ went to Calvary, he took the sins of the whole church of all the ages yet unborn and past, and he took the sins of the whole redeemed of the Lord with him and died for them on the cross of Calvary. God so loved the church.

Now, I know it goes beyond that, but it involves the church. Now, you see what's happened? God in Christ expressed himself in a love for every Christian man and woman. There is no Christian in the church that God did not love in Christ, past, present, or future.

Not one solitary believer. Very well, then. Now, that same God is said to come and live in you and live in me.

The same God as came in Jesus Christ. A God who is, not who was, love. John doesn't say God was love in Jesus Christ.

That's true, of course, but that's not what John says. What John says is this. God is eternally present.

God is love. If, therefore, the God who is eternally love and who loved the whole church in his Son Jesus Christ now comes to live in me, if he's going to look at some of the saints and say, look, I've got nothing to do with you, John. You keep as far from me as you can.

I don't want to sit by you. I don't want to pray with you. I don't like the looks of you.

I don't like the color of your skin. I don't think you're rich enough. I don't think you're clever enough.

God have mercy on us. Is God such a self-contradictory being that whom he loved in Christ, he doesn't live as he comes in me today? Men and women, we can't play with religion, you know. This is no hobby.

If God is in my heart today, he will love those whom he loved in Christ yesterday, and he'll not leave anyone else. And if, apparently, he does leave somebody out, that reflects upon my experience of him. And it may mean, not necessarily, but it may mean that I know nothing about the true God.

God who lived in Christ over a period of 33 years is the same one who comes to live in his people. Therefore, if he lives in his people, he will love the people he loved in Christ 2,000 years ago. Oh, can I stress the fact that God has not changed.

But I'll tell you one thing that is changed, which makes it more sure that God will love his people through you and through me, if he lives in us. We have changed. God has not changed.

God is love eternally. But in Christ, you see, God loved us when we were in our sin. God loved me when I was in the mire and the clay.

He loved you when you were rebellious, arrogant, proud, blasphemer, perhaps. You know your sins, and I remember mine only too well. But he loved us in that condition.

He cast the mantle of his great, wonderful love around us, and he loved us when we were yet sinners. But since then, by the grace of God, we've changed. We've repented of our sins.

We've become reconciled to God. Now we're his children. Right.

If God loved us when we were in that wretched condition of rebellion, surely God will love us now that we are reconciled to him. Paul uses precisely this argument in Romans 5. I have no time to extend it here this morning. If while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, much more being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life? You see the point? So the God who lives in you, if he's the same as the God who came in Jesus Christ, he will want to love every saint.

And I could add one other thing. Whereas in Christ it costs God the Father the costliest treasure of his heart to show his love toward us, it isn't as costly to love the saints. God doesn't have to provide his Son to die to love the saints through us.

He will more certainly then love his people if he's really in our hearts. See, the tragedy is that God is an idea to so many of us and not a reality. God is a doctrine, full stop, period.

But God is a person, active and vibrant and living and motivating. And if that God is in your heart and mind, it ought to be seen in this that God in us is making for our brother Christian, is concerned for those in distant places that we've not seen, as well as those right here, but we do see and hear and need. Now that's the first thrust of our text this morning.

If God so loved us, we ought. And I pray for grace as I go my way that this ought, this imperative, this categorical imperative will tug at my conscience and my soul and help me to remember this. Will you pray the same prayer with me? Now the second thing, and I shall just mention it.

As Christians love one another, we perform a ministry that no one else in the whole world can perform. No man has ever seen God, says John. No man has ever seen God.

If we love one another, God lives on in us. And though he doesn't say so, in so many words, the implication of it, and this is fairly generally agreed, is this, that the God who is not seen directly by any man is seen indirectly by what he's doing and what he's saying in his people. And thereby, the end of the verse, and thereby God's love comes to full bloom and reaches its climax and its goal and its motives and its aims in God's loving people.

Now this is very challenging, isn't it? Let's just look at it very briefly. First of all, God is unseen. No man has ever seen God.

I guess this needs a little explanation. What is implied here, of course, is that God as spirit, God in his essential essence and being, has never been seen. You can't see God who is spirit.

God told Moses, no man can see my face and live, anyway. But no man has seen God, Paul tells us in two places. He speaks in Timothy 1.17 of the immortal, invisible, and only God.

Then in the same letter to Timothy chapter 6 and verse 16, he goes on, he says, this will be made manifest at the proper time by the blessed and only sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who

alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see. God in his essential essence, God as spirit is unseen and no man can see him. You and I haven't got the apparatus to see God with spirit.

But what happens then? Is God forever unknown? No, well, God is not unknown, but God chooses means whereby he communicates and reveals himself to us. There are certain things that may be known about God from the world around us, as Paul says, even as eternal power and God is by the things which are made. We see the hand of God in our consciences and in our moral beings, in our moral nature.

But not only that, God has chosen various ways and means of coming near to men. Think of the history of Israel. God spoke to Moses in a bush that was burning and burning and burning, but unconsumed.

God revealed himself to Israel in a pillar of fire and of cloud. God revealed himself to Isaiah the prophet in the temple as a king dressed up in all his regalia of office and his skirts filled the temple. There was no room for any man.

Everything was filled up with the skirts of the king, the king's garments. But you see, God is spirit. God is not a bush, and God is not fire, and God is not a pillar.

And God is not a king dressed up. God is spirit. God was choosing these elements whereby to come near to men in a way that he could communicate with them.

And then at last, of course, and most fully and adequately in the passion of his son, said Jesus, they that have seen me have seen the Father. Ah, but wait a moment. How did we see the Father? As spirit? No.

His spirit was in Christ, but it was the Father dwelling among us in the form of a man, child of Mary, conceived of the Holy Ghost. Wesley puts it succinctly and beautifully in the familiar words, veiled in flesh, the Godhead seen. Hail the incarnate deity.

Pleased as man with man to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel. God is with us, but not just as spirit. We could not see him if he were mere spirit.

God is with us in a man. He took flesh to his spirit, that in the flesh he might be made known. Walk among us, talk with us, die for us.

No man has seen God then in his essential essence. Pardon me for staying with that for so long, but now this is the point of relevance for us. If we love one another.

You're a Christian? Are you in Christ? And there's another Christian by your side this morning, sitting behind you, sitting in front of you, right? He's talking to us now. If we love one another, God lives on in us. God is alive in us.

The unseen God that no man has ever seen directly in this essential being, a spirit, he is alive in us. He's taken our flesh and blood. He's living in our hearts, and from within us he's gaining control of our minds and our wills and our consciences, and he's trying to hold our hands and use them and take our feet and lead us, and so forth.

God is alive in us, and the implication is that the God that men cannot see in his essential essence, they can see and even feel insofar as Christians really love one another. You know, there should be an atmosphere in the house of God. I deliberately put it like that.

There should be an atmosphere abroad whenever God's people come together. The kind of thing which is a foretaste of heaven because we love one another. Now, there's more to it than that, even, but particularly because of this.

We're in the body of Christ. We're indwelt by the same Father and Spirit and Son, and we are redeemed with the same price, and because of that, there should be something about us which is evident to the world, and when they come in, it's like coming into the warmth from the cold and arctic winter of the world. Men and women, this so or this is not so, insofar as you and I are living up to our heavenly calling.

Here, then, is one of the most compelling of all conceivable reasons why Christ should, why Christians, rather, should love one another. You see, God's glory is at stake. God is very distant from people in the world this morning.

They don't know anything about Him. Now, you may say, well, that's Satan, and that's the fall. Yes, you're quite right.

That's due to sin in us. Yes, you're quite right. Shall I tell you something that neither you nor I like to hear? It is also because you and I don't love each other as we ought.

It is, you know, for God lives in His people, and the God who lives on in His people says that He is unchangeably a God who is love, and He wants to love on in the people in whom He lives. In other words, says John, it is by this means that the love of God, the whole purpose and scheme and strategy of the divine love is perfected, comes to its goal. It is in us, reaping of the fruit of His love in Christ and by the Spirit, and now leaping over every boundary that might conceivably separate us from one another and rejoicing in the unity of the Spirit and in the bond of peace and in the grace of God.

My friends, what has this got to say to us? It's no wonder, is it, that John repeats this treatise over. I guess some of you full people here in Oxford are thinking that I'm overdoing it and preaching so much about this these days, and the other tests of righteousness and of doctrine. Well, John did it, and I believe John did it because it was absolutely important, and if that is the divine pattern, we've got to see it through you now.

There's a word of prayer that comes to my heart. I invite you to pray it with me. You'll not have heard it before.

Here it is. Love through us, love of God, those whom in Christ you love, reveal yourself to blinded men, as in our midst you live again, and may the vision be to them life from the dead. Let us pray.

Our heavenly Father, though this word of thine brings us face to face with a mirror that is all too clean and shining and clear for us, we nevertheless thank thee for the discomfort and the displeasure it causes, giving thanks on that score because we believe that such a disclosure of our own condition is a means to our own healing. Oh, come among your people in these days, here in Knox and in every other Christian community, to mission stations and on mission fields, in churches here and there, little groups who find it difficult to get on with one another in Christ. Oh, send us, we pray, the new realization of our duty, but along with that, a new appreciation of the immensity of the power that is within us, because you yourself are alive in your people.

Oh, God our Father, live in us. May we be able to say with the same authority and the same conviction as the Apostle Paul, Christ liveth in me. May we be able to address every other Christian in difficulty and in doubt and say, greater is he that is in you than he who is in the world.

And accepting our brothers and our sisters in the embrace of an abiding love, may we together grow in grace and in usefulness and bring to thee our Father, to Jesus Christ our Savior and the Holy Spirit our Indweller the glory and the praise which is thine own prerogative. Hear us, our Father, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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