

I John - Love Comes From God

by Mariano Di Gangi

The sermon emphasizes that love is the essence of God's character and calls Christians to reflect that love in their relationships with one another.

Duration: 30:46

Topics: "Love"

Description

In this sermon, Adolf Monneau, a pastor and preacher, reflects on the love of God in the face of his own impending death. Despite his physical weakness, Monneau emphasizes the importance of understanding that God is love and that this knowledge should shape our actions towards God and one another. He highlights two ways in which God has revealed his love: through the sending of his son to deal with the problem of sin, and through believers demonstrating God's love in their lives. Monneau encourages listeners to not only proclaim the message of salvation but also to embody God's love in their interactions with others.

Transcript

Let us hear the word of God as we turn to John's first letter, chapter four, and commencing to read it to verse one. Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God.

Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. But every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming, and even now is already in the world.

You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us, but whoever is not from God does not listen to us.

This is how we recognize the spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood. Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us. He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

This is love, not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his Son, an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in us.

And his love is made complete in us. We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testified that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love.

Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us, so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment.

The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, I love God, yet hates his brother, he is a liar.

For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command, whoever loves God must also love his brother. May God add his blessing to this reading of his holy word.

Our text for today is taken from the scripture lesson that was read earlier in the service, focusing particularly on verses 7 through 12 of 1 John chapter 4. I suppose one could summarize the history of the church in the following terms, formation, deformation, reformation. But even when there has been reformation, there can also be decline and departure, which demands renewal. One of the men whom God used mightily to bring renewal to his church in the nation of France during the first half of the 19th century was a man by the name of Adolphe Monod.

In case you're wondering, it's spelled M-O-N-O-D. He was fifth in a family of 14 children. His father and grandfather were ministers of the gospel.

Sensing a call to the ministry, he went off to Geneva and studied theology. Then he was ordained to the ministry of the word and sacraments, and he began his ministry going through the motions, but without a depth of conviction. And it was on a journey southward to Naples, Italy, to a church in which I have had the privilege of preaching the word of God in recent years, that there in the colorful, chaotic Italian city of Naples, through the influence of a British Isles man named Erskine, that Adolphe Monod came to a conversion experience.

He had known the theology, he had read the book, but now he met the living Lord, who is the heart of the theology and who had given the revelation enshrined in this book. And then his ministry took a tremendously different direction, and God used him to bring spiritual renewal to men and women whose religiosity had become a mere dull routine, to men and women who had been Christians in name only, and now came to see that the important thing was not merely a relation to a church organization, but to be joined to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. When Adolphe Monod was still in his very early 50s, he was stricken with a painful and terminable disease.

And for the last several months of his life, when he could no longer fulfill his duties as pastor and preacher, friends would gather around his bedside Sunday by Sunday. They would sing a hymn, they would offer prayer, they would break bread together, then scripture would be read, and he would give a very brief homily with his weakening frame. Just a few days before he died, they went through this process of family devotions around his bedside, and then when it came to delivering what turned out to be his last brief homily, Adolphe Monod said these words, I have only strength sufficient to underline the message of the love of God, that God has loved us.

That is the sum and substance of Christian doctrine, that we must love God and one another, that is the very essence of Christian morality. And what he said at that time was but the echo of the apostolic word which is our text for today. Dear friends, let us love one another for love comes from God.

Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us, he sent his one and only son into the world that we might live through him.

This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God, but if we love each other, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

What we have here at the very outset is an affirmation regarding the character of God. God is love. Already in this brief letter, in the first chapter at verse five, the apostle has given us another affirmation concerning the character of God by saying, God is light.

And in order to begin to understand the tremendous depth of that comment, we need to remember that in scripture, darkness symbolizes ignorance, iniquity, and death. To say that God is light is to say that he is not ignorance, but truth, that he is not iniquity, but purity, that he is not death, but life. And in the light of God, in the presence of him who is altogether pure and absolutely holy, our sin is exposed and our moral failure literally comes to light.

And the apostle in the first chapter of this letter tells us that when we are confronted with our sins in the presence of him who is light, there are a variety of expedients that we may try to employ to get away from the sting of the conviction of sin. We may deny that we are sinners by nature. We may insist that we continue to have fellowship with God, even though we are walking in the direction that is opposite to him.

We may compare our faults with those of others, and since we grade the paper to come out with a superior rank. Or we may blame it on our heredity, or we may shift the fault to our environment, or we can use the expedient, the devil made me do it, and so get away from personal responsibility in the matter. But when we realize that God is light, our sins are exposed in the light of his countenance.

The entrance of his word gives light and exposes our darkness, and there is only one way to deal with the situation, and that too is stated by the apostle in very clear terms. If we confess our sin instead of trying to hide it, he will show himself to be faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. He has already made an affirmation concerning the character of God, saying God is light.

But now he makes another that is equally important, and he says God is love. How do we know that God is love? Why is it important for us to know that God is love? It's important for us to know what God is really

like so that we may know that at the heart of the universe and over the creation, there is not one who is arbitrary but affectionate, one who is not capricious but kind, one who is not grim but gracious. In a world of hurt, of disappointment, of indifference, of hatred, of violence, we need to remember that God is love and we must dare to act accordingly.

But how has the love of God been revealed? The apostle tells us that God has made known his love in two unmistakable ways. First, in the sending of his son. This is love, that he loved us and sent his son to deal with the problem of our sins.

When God purposed to do something and to launch a rescue operation without parallel in human history, he did not send an angel, though he had many at his disposal. He did not send Old Testament saints who already peopled the golden shore of glory. When God purposed to rescue mankind from the blight and power of sin, he sent neither saints nor angels, but he sent his own son.

His unique son, his beloved son, his divine and eternal son. God spared not his own son, but yielded him up for our everlasting good. And God revealed his love not only in the sending of the son, but in the sacrifice of the son.

He came not merely to teach or to heal, but to save. And the point of gravity, the central focus in the Christian faith is not so much the cradle at Bethlehem, but the cross at Calvary. He came and he had this mission to fulfill, to become an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

In this was revealed the love of God in the sending of the son and in the sacrifice of the son. And the word that in the New International Version is translated as atoning sacrifice in the original text comes through with intensely theological overtones. And it's the word propitiation, propitiation, which is found in some of the older versions.

And people find the concept of propitiation difficult to grasp. And that's because we have a diluted view of sin. We must remember that sin is disorder and disobedience to the will of God.

That sin is not merely flouting social conventions and outraging our fellow men and fragmenting the fellowship that we might have enjoyed with each other. Sin is an assault against the moral majesty of God. It is the willful, stubborn rebellion of the individual against his maker.

It is man insulting and attacking the Almighty. And when man sins, the wrath of God is kindled. And when we speak of the wrath of God, we do not mean some vindictive passion, some irrational anger, some venting of a celestial spleen against the inhabitants of the earth.

When we speak of the wrath of God, we mean the hurt, the displeasure, the irreconcilable difference, the recoil of a holy God against the sinfulness, the iniquity, and the transgression of man. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. Yet God is not willing that any should perish.

And he provides his own sinless son, and his sinless son is willing to provide himself to take and bear in his own body the penalty of our sin on the tree. This is what the Apostle Paul means in Galatians 3.13 when he says that he, the blessed one, became a curse for us. What bore down heavily on us was willingly lifted by him and taken away.

Though it would crush him, yet he would take it from us. And so we can be forgiven the justice of God, having been met by the willingness of God to yield up his own son in our stead. So propitiation is not

merely a theological term for academics to dispute about.

It is a concept that is at the very heart of the gospel, that the Father sent the Son to lay down his life for us, an atoning sacrifice for sin. And in this revealed his love. So every time we think of the mission of the Son of God coming into the world and of his sacrifice in going up to the hill of the cross, you and I have tangible, visible, audible proofs of the love of God, an affirmation of the character of God.

God is love. But the second thing that we need to notice is that here we have an exhortation concerning the conduct of the Christian. None of the apostles are interested in merely giving us theological propositions that we might believe them.

These theological propositions are given so that we might believe and so that the belief might shape our way of thinking, of speaking, and of living. Truth is always unto the consequence of godliness. And biblical principles are meant to have a powerful impact for good upon our practices.

And so the apostle moves from speaking of the revelation of the love of God to the responsibility of men and women like us to mirror that love in our relationships with each other. There's no doubt about the fact that we are exhorted to mutual love. In verse 11, it is written, Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

And the chapter concludes with a statement. He has given us this command. Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

What does it mean to love one another? Let's lift this out of the morass of sheer sickly sentimentality and put it down in plain terms of responsibility. To love one another means to bear one another's burdens and not aggravate one another's situation. It means using forbearance, patience with one another.

It means being as willing to forgive as we want God to be forgiving toward us. It means being willing to show someone else the way, to give someone else a word of encouragement, to offer even correction, provided that we speak the truth in love. It means interceding for one another.

It means being willing to listen to one another. It means making a special effort to understand one another. My study of the past 2,000 years of church history, confirmed by my 60 years of involvement in evangelical Protestantism, has convinced me beyond all doubt that there are as many churches that are wrecked by lovelessness as are ruined by heresy.

We are exhorted to mutual love. Scripture makes that exceedingly plain. That mutual love is a sure sign of spiritual rebirth.

Love comes from God and everyone who loves God has been born of God and knows God. Children do in a greater or lesser extent resemble their parents. I can do that with my grandchildren and my children and pictures of my wife and I, and we can discern traits that are persisted and perpetuated generation by generation.

You and I as Christians claim to be children of God. Do we resemble our Heavenly Father? God is love. Are we loving? It takes far more than chattering about being born again.

If we are born again, we must reflect the character of our Heavenly Father who gave us birth. Mutual love is a sign of spiritual rebirth. And if in our hearts we nurture prejudice and if in our lives we practice hatred

and bigotry, that should give us pause in claiming to be children of God.

Except we repent and turn to him with brokenness of heart. Furthermore, mutual love proves that we know God. This past Wednesday, we concluded our Knox Summer Fellowship for the year 1990.

Our theme has been Rediscovering God. And night by night, evangelical scholars have faithfully expounded to us the teaching of the Bible concerning the character of God. The love of God, the grace of God, the patience of God, the omniscience of God, the omnipresence of God, the faithfulness of God.

You and I can know all the attributes of God, and we can ably recite the various proof texts that bolster the doctrines that we hold concerning the character of God. And still be spiritually ignorant of the character of God unless we have mutual love one toward another. For God is love, and he who is loveless has not yet learned the first thing about the essence of the character of God.

It is not merely an intellectual exercise to be familiar with the attributes of God, but a matter of reflecting those attributes, particularly the attribute of love, which is utterly indispensable to our right relationships in the Church of Jesus Christ and in our individual families. The final thing that the apostle stresses is this, that mutual love makes God's love real to others. Note what it says in verse 12.

No one has ever seen God, but if we love each other, God lives in us and his love is made complete or is perfected in us. Many people in our day today, without even knowing it, are groping after God and guessing about God. What is God really like? You and I can make God known not simply by presenting the ABCs of salvation, but by demonstrating his love in us, reaching out through us to them to touch and to transform their lives.

You can bring forth the most learned arguments and evidences for the Christian faith in debating on a university campus or with someone at work. But the irrefutable apologetic is this, God, the invisible, lives in me. God has clothed himself with my frail, feeble flesh.

God, through me, speaks. God, through me, thinks. God, through me, acts.

The love of God, the God who indwells me, should become visible, audible, tangible, because he, the God who is love, lives in us and through us reaches out to others. And so the apostle tells us that love comes from God. But it must not stop there.

Through us, it must reach out to touch and change for the better the lives of others. Let's make it our aim during the days of a week that has now newly begun to dwell upon the revelation of God's love in the incarnation and sacrifice of his son Jesus and to practice that love with one another, beginning with those who are nearest and dearest to each of us. Let us pray.

Lord of light, you are also the God of love. You have revealed your love to us in that cradle and on that cross. Now be pleased to dwell within our hearts by your Holy Spirit.

So that the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, might change our relationships and we might resemble you, whom we call our Heavenly Father. We ask it in the name of your dear son, Jesus. Amen.

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