

OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

SHINING A LIGHT ON AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY
LIVING WITH PRACTICAL LOVE (1 JOHN 4:7-21)
MAY 6, 2018



SERMON OUTLINE

Love is the Third Test of Authentic Spiritual Influence

Love was revealed for a Purpose – that we might Live

We know we Live in God when we Confess the Witness's story about Jesus

Love's Completed Purpose in us produces a life transforming Confidence

Spiritual Influencers who Love have an impact on the World and on One Another

What do I need to do with what I have heard today?

MAIN POINT

We show we have experienced God's love by loving others.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. When you were growing up, did your family place any expectations on you simply because you were a family member (i.e., working in the family business, participating in certain events, completing chores, etc.)?

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2. What are some central values you learnt from your family of origin?

Leader: In previous generations, children (especially sons) often carried on the family business. For instance, if the father was a carpenter, it was a given that the boys in the family would continue in the family trade of carpentry. Oftentimes family names became synonymous with a specific trade. For Christians, the “family trade” is love. The apostle John made the case that love is a valid test of our fellowship and identity as God’s children because “God is love.” Love is an attribute of God; it’s part of His nature. If we are united with the Father through faith in Jesus Christ, we will share His nature. And since His nature is love, we will be people who demonstrate love.

DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> [HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 JOHN 4:7-12.](#)

3. John described love as a key trait of the Christian. Why must this be the case?

4. What does this Christian love look like and do you see it as different from all others? Explain.

Leader: Loving others gives evidence of being God’s child and having a right relationship with Him. God is the source of love. He expects His children to function as channels of His love to others. Elsewhere, John made it clear that the genuine child of God demonstrates both faith and love (1 John 3:23). Salvation, or being born of God, is God’s gift that we receive by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9). Human love, however, no matter how noble it appears, falls short if it fails to include Christ as the supreme focus of its devotion. Love by itself does not indicate that one has been born of God.

5. What does it mean that Jesus is the “atoning sacrifice for our sins” (see 1 John 2:2 and 2 Corinthians 5:21)? In what sense is this a loving act?

Leader: See “Spotlight on the Passage” note on 4:9-10 for further details and help in answering question 5.

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6. If our salvation was based upon our love for God, could we ever be certain of our salvation? Explain.

Leader: See Titus 3:3-7 and Philippians 1:6, on Paul's confidence in God over man, for help in answering question 6. We cannot understand the nature of God's love by considering our own love for Him. It's not that we loved God first; instead, God took the initiative to love us. Genuine love begins with God. He loved us first, and our love exists only as a response to His initiation. God revealed His love by sending His Son as a propitiation, or an atoning sacrifice, for our sins. God Himself paid the cost of our forgiveness. God pardoned the sins of rebellious humanity against Himself at His own cost through the shed blood of His Son. The costliness of His self-sacrifice and the totally undeserving nature of those who receive the benefit from it show the greatness of His love.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 JOHN 4:13-21.

7. What role does the Holy Spirit play in our love for God? What about in our love for others?

Leader: See Romans 5:5 on God pouring love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, and Galatians 5:22-25 on our love for others being through the Holy Spirit, for help in answering question 7.

8. What are some of the ways God's love is seen living in us by the world around us (or should be seen)? How do we do this as individuals, and how do we do this as a church body?

Leader: John pointed to the confession that Jesus is the Son of God as the determining factor for who has God living in them, and who does not. For those who make this confession, God lives in them. His presence is a source of comfort and confidence that they are His, that they are loved. Love, then, becomes the distinguishing mark of children of God. If God is love, as John previously stated, then His love will overflow out of the lives of His followers and into the lives of those with whom they come into contact.

9. While God's love has the power to drive out all fear, John spoke specifically about the fear of the Day of Judgment. How does God's love eliminate fears about death, the end times, and God's judgment?

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10. What is supposed to be the Christian's motivation to love others (v. 19)? What are some false or inappropriate motivations for loving others that people have from time to time?

Leader: In these verses, John reminded his readers that because God first loved us—not because of anything we do on our own—our desires and affections are transformed so that love replaces our selfishness. The natural human bent is toward self-gratification and self-preservation, but the love of God frees us to live sacrificially and selflessly. This is the example of love Jesus demonstrated for His followers, and it is the theme throughout this letter from John. This is a needed reminder in our current age when many are focused on the applause of man through social media and other means.

DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

11. What has stood out for you in this study about God's love and His command that we love one another? How do you see that knowledge changing what you will do or how you will live from this time forward?

12. What are the implications for us as a group in God's command that we love one another? How can we better live out this command?

PRAYER

Pray and thank God that He deals with us, His children, in the language of love. Thank Him for defining love through Jesus, and pray that we would love each other in the same practical and tangible ways He has loved us.

MEMORIZE

We love because he first loved us. - 1 John 4:19

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

1 JOHN 4:7-21

4:7-8. The letter returns to a subject already talked about—love—which comes from God. If we want to be like God, we, too, must love. Love becomes another test of believers. Only those born of God know how to love. They know how because they know God, the only source of love. We

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must admit that we see remarkable displays of sacrificial love among those who reject Christ. So in what sense can we agree that everyone who loves is born of God? It would be wrong to conclude that anybody who shows love is a child of God, regardless of whether he or she actually believes in Jesus.

This conclusion is possible only if we take this statement out of its context. John has already made the point that the true child of God both loves and believes (3:23). Yet, even those who are not true children of God can love others—sometimes even more fully than many Christians—because we have all been created in the image of God. The capacity to love comes to us as part of divine creation. Yet, true love—love that includes loving God and the full expression of love for others, namely telling them about salvation in Jesus— is characteristic only of true Christians.

Then John flipped the coin over, claiming that anyone who does not show love does not know God. The evidence of this? The nature of God. His very essence is love. Thus, this negative test seems easier to understand. How could someone receive divine life through Jesus, have the indwelling Holy Spirit, and not love? A person saved by love and indwelt with love must love. We may have trouble loving perfectly, but there is a big difference between not loving perfectly and not loving at all.

4:9-10. If we need to love as God loved, we might wonder how God loved. The clear answer appears in 3:16: This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. Verse 9 says the same thing from the Father's perspective. God the Father showed how he loves. He sent his one and only Son, knowing he would be horribly treated and ultimately crucified. This is how God loved. He sacrificed his Son so we might live through him.

This immeasurable gift was in no way a response to humanity's love for God. Quite the opposite. It was initiated by God. We respond to him. Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins. God solved our problem at his expense. He made Jesus our atoning sacrifice. This term (*hilasmos*) appears only here and in 2:2 (related words are used in Matt. 16:22; Luke 18:13; Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; 8:12; 9:5). This is language of religious sacrifice, used in Greek religion for rites designed to placate the anger of the gods. Theologians argue whether Christ's sacrificial death on the cross should be described as expiation or propitiation. Expiation emphasizes payment of a penalty to remove guilt. Propitiation speaks of appeasing or averting God's wrath.

4:11-12. God set the standard of love for us. Since we are children of God, we should love other people, especially fellow believers, just as God loved us. God has never been seen in his pure form (Exod. 33:20,23; Deut. 4:12; John 1:18; 5:37; 6:46; cf. John 12:45; 14:9; 17:24; 1 John 1:1-3; 4:14). If you want to know what God is like, you can look at what he has done for us and what we should do for one another. This invisible God actually lives in us. The love he has for us is made visible and complete as we love one another. This is the way the world sees God's love, as it is expressed by him through our lives. Only as God's love completes its purpose of reaching out to those he loves—the world (John 3:16)—is his love complete or fulfilled.

Verse 13 looks back to verse 12. How is God's love expressed and made complete through us? The Spirit does it. Our ability to love one another is dependent upon the Spirit whom he has given us. The Spirit lives in us, implants God's love in us, exercises his love through us, and thus ensures us that we live in God.

4:14-16. John's readers probably never saw Jesus in the flesh. False teachers, however, claimed to have made heavenly journeys during which they saw God in heaven. This is impossible. God cannot be seen. How do you deny the claims of these teachers and still say, we have seen? How, if your readers have never seen Jesus, can they testify that God sent his Son to be our Savior? First, John and his fellow apostles saw Jesus in the flesh, but the majority of those who saw Jesus did not join in the testimony. They cried for his crucifixion.

Second, such testimony is based on more than eyewitness. It comes through eyes of faith. Only after the resurrection did this testimony become real for the apostles. They testified to the church.

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Then the church accepted and repeated their testimony. We do the same.

Third, you do not have to see the earthly Jesus to testify about what God has done through him. You need only hear and believe in the testimony to him from Scripture and from faithful followers. Such testimony is both verbal testimony and God's love exercised through our lives. The impact God has made in other Christians— this is what we have seen. Based on the manifestation of Jesus in the lives of Christians, those who have witnessed it can testify that the Father sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world. That is, God sent Jesus to the cross to pay for our sins so we do not have to suffer the wages sin pays, namely, death.

Testimony about Jesus tells more than what Jesus did— save from sin. It also tells who he is— the Son of God. Again, all this goes against false teachers. They apparently claimed Jesus could not be human, thus could not die on the cross. On the other hand, Scripture claims that anyone who acknowledges this Savior they have seen is a true Christian, living in union with God.

This section concludes by repeating an affirmation made earlier— that God is love and that the person who lives in love lives in God, and God in him. This is the test of true Christianity in the letters of John. We must recognize the basic character of God, rooted in love. We must experience that love in our own relationship with God. Others must experience this God kind of love in their relationships with us. That's why God sent Jesus to die on the cross for our sins.

4:17-18. The judgment seat of Christ received brief mention in 2:28 and now reappears briefly to assure us we can face Christ on that day with confidence. Such confidence comes because we live in love toward God and one another. The person who does not live in love toward his brother may experience shame (2:28). However, if we live in love toward our brothers, we will have confidence when we face Jesus because in this world we are like him. No one who was like Jesus in this world can fear approaching Jesus' judgment seat. Fear expects punishment. One who loves expects to receive love.

Why? Because mature love has no fear. A Christian who fears the judgment seat of Christ shows that God's love has not yet reached maturity (been made perfect) in him. A person who lives in love toward God has nothing to fear on the day of judgment.

4:19-21. God first loved us and made a relationship with him possible. The text drives home its refutation of the antichrists and false prophets. We cannot claim we love God and then show that we hate our brothers. This only proves one thing: we are liars.

It is difficult to prove whether or not we love God based on our actions toward him because we cannot see him. Love for God is reflected in love for his children, our brothers and sisters, whom we can see. Therefore, God gave us this verifiable command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. Jesus stated the principle in other words: whatever you did not do for one of the least of these you did not do for me (Matt. 25:40).