

God Is Love

1 John 4:8-11

Life Without Love?

“I can’t imagine life without this person.”

I’ve heard people say this about someone they love very dearly. And on the other side, I’ve heard people say that they would rather not live at all than to be forced to continue in a loveless relationship. I don’t think these statements are the exaggerated, emotional ravings of the deeply hurt or hopelessly lovesick. I think these are the most honest statements a person could make because they reveal a fundamental truth about the human condition: life must be more than mere existence. It must be existence *in a loving relationship*.

This truth is expressed in Psalm 63:3: “Your lovingkindness,” the psalmist sings, “is *better* than life” (emphasis added). What could be better than life? Or, to put it another way, what could be worse than dying? The answer: Living without love. Subtract love from living, and living becomes lifeless.

While everyone seems to know this intuitively, few bother to ask why this is the case. Why is love so essential to life? Our text provides the answer: because God, the author of life, is himself love.

The thesis statement of this sermon is found in 1 John 4:11, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

1. **The Reality of Love.** “Love is from God . . . God is love” (1 John 4:7, 8).

When John says, “God is love,” we must ask, “How could God be love for all eternity, if there were no beings for him to love before he created us?” The answer is that there *was* something for God to love before he created us. God is not a single-person God. Rather, he is a three-personed God, so that within the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, there has been eternal giving of self, adoration, and glorification. This means that God created us, not because he needed people to love (would that be love anyway?), but in order to share the overflow of the love he already enjoyed.

True selfless, others-oriented love can be real only if there is such a Being as the Triune God.

2. **The Problem of Love.** “Not that we loved God.” “Our sins” (1 John 4:10).

Our text points to a problem: we have not loved God, and this failure to love God is called *sin*. Sin is not what most people think of when they hear the word. It is not necessarily grimy, stinky, shameful, and hidden. It comes in respectable, classy, and religious packages. Sin is simply loving something other than God, and springs from the belief that there is some good outside of God. It happens when we treat our family, career, wealth, body image, or religious reputation as what has ultimate value over God. This is why sin is nearly impossible to detect if you view sin only as breaking certain moral codes.

3. **The Proof of Love.** “In this was the love of God made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. . . he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:9-10).

True to his nature—and despite our sin—God continued to love, and this love showed itself as it had from eternity past: self-giving. “God sent his only Son into the world.” Jesus, who should have been treated as lovely, for he never sinned, was treated as if he were the most ugly, unlovable person on earth. He did this so that *we* could be treated as the objects of God’s love. The word “propitiation” means an offering that turns away wrath—specifically, God’s wrath against our sin. There is nothing

unworthy in God being wrathful. It is the only right response to human sin. Jesus, however, took that wrath upon himself in our place. This is the highest and final demonstration of God's love for us—that he, as the offended party, would stand in the place of the offending party and suffer the consequence we deserve.

4. **The Practice of Love.** “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:11).

No one who truly understands the love of God can remain neutral to it. To know God's love is to be moved to love God and others and to enter into the joyful “orbit” of God's eternal Triune love. The Apostle John returns to this theme again and again: “Whoever loves his brother abides in the light” (2:10); “This is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another” (3:11); “Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth” (3:18); “Love one another, just as he commanded us” (3:23); “He who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen” (4:20); “Whoever loves God must also love his brother” (4:21).

Discussion Questions

1. What is the connection between the love of God and God as a Trinity? How would you explain to someone the difference between the three-personed God of historic Christianity and the single-person God of (for example) Islam or the Jehovah's Witnesses?
2. John explains sin in 2:15-16 without even using the word. How do these verses help us understand (a) what sin is, (b) what it does, and (c) what its consequences are?
3. What is it about Christ's accomplishment on the cross that demonstrates God's love? How does this tend to move our hearts?
4. Imagine that you had a deeper understanding of how much God loved you. What might change about your outlook on life? Envision the person or persons you find it hardest to love. How would your deeper understanding of God's love change how you think about those people?
5. Many people including ourselves tend to think as follows: (a) “I love God, but not the church;” or (b) “I'm generally a loving person, but I'm surrounded by people I can't love;” or (c) “I can define for myself what love looks like.” In light of what we have learned about God's love, how would you evaluate and respond to those statements?