

“The Transforming Love of God”

1 John 4:7-21

Intro

For the month of January I want to do some messages that I am calling “**Back to Basics**” – some teachings from God’s Word that I have personally found to be very lifechanging and that I need to come back to time and time again in my walk. So these sermons might be more for me than anyone but you can listen in and hopefully benefit, too.

Today is one of those that is so foundational to all we do and that is the **Love of God**. I get to preach on the love of God today! What a privilege.

Paul said the love of Christ constrains me

Apostle John called himself the beloved, the one whom Jesus loved

Hosea was called to marry a harlot who would not be faithful and to continue to love her to show God’s love for His adulterous people

Ro. 8 says nothing can separate us from His love

And on and on the bible speaks of God’s amazing love. I am calling this message the “Transforming love of God” because God wants His love to transform us, which of course is a process.

(Love is a dominant theme in much of our society, from the music on the radio ... shows on TV ... movies So many will in some way show our search for love, usually in a person, that longing in every heart to have someone who is crazy about them and loves them and pursues them and they live happily ever after.

Unfortunately so many end up doing what the old song says ‘searching for love in all the wrong places.’ And in this pursuit of love many are left wanting and hurt and needy.

This is because the only One who knows us completely and loves us totally is our creator: God Almighty. What your heart and mine is ultimately longing for is the love that only God can give. God has created us all with a deep need to give and receive love and the only place that can be experienced at the deepest level is with God.

The problem is that most of us (even Christians) only know God’s love at an academic, head level ... I pray today that this might change and that God by His Holy Spirit might begin to work His love from our head to our heart.

Eph. 3 ... it surpasses knowledge ... we need a revelation and this is my prayer

“and to know **His love that surpasses knowledge** – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” Ephesians 3:19

Pray – so let’s stop and pray right now that God might give this revelation of His love to us.

1 John 4:7-21

TS I want to make 4 points from this passage today

1. God's love is at the core of who He is.

1 John 4:8-9

8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Notice in this passage that God is defined as love. There are not many God is statement in the bible but you can be assured that those that there are are very important. I believe God's holiness and love are His 2 central attributes and that all others flow from these.

To show you how significant this is consider the difference between saying "God loves" and "God is love." God loves means that He is capable of loving and may or may not depending on the situation, but to say "God is Love" means that love is part of His very nature and He cannot not love. He cannot stop being a loving God. God and love are as inseparable as H₂O and water. It is part of His very nature. You cannot separate love and God.

"God's love finds expression in everything He says and does." J.I. Packer (*Knowing God*, p. 111)

Even His judgement. Even His discipline of us, remember in Hebr. 12 "For those whom He loves He disciplines."

Love is at the core of who He is. Therefore, we can rest assured that God will never stop loving. And our ability to love comes from God because v. 7 says we are to love because love comes from God. The fact that humans know and experience love is a proof of God's very existence. Talk about that with an atheist sometime.

(The fact that people are searching so for love today shows me that they are really searching for God but don't know it. We need to help people see that their search for and need for love is really a need for God.

The bible describes God's love in many ways, here are a few. His love is:

a. Everlasting

Jer 31:3

3 The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying:

"I have loved you with an **everlasting love**;
I have drawn you with loving-kindness.

God's love will never end. It will continue through all eternity.

Ex. Funeral: This week as we grieved the death of Betty Jo Schultz, we can rejoice that the love God has for her (and for us) will never end. Betty Jo is enjoying that love now and will for all eternity.

Some of you might say, "But David, I have really blown it. I have:

Had an abortion – Jer. 31:3

Been wayward and rebellious – Jer. 31:3
Hit my child this week or lost my temper – Jer. 31:3
Fell into some sin just this week – Jer. 31:3
Haven't spend time with God in a long time – Jer. 31:3
His love (for you) will never stop

TS This leads to our next description of God's love:

b. Unconditional – Dt. 7:7-8

Deut 7:7-8

7 The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. 8 But it was **because the LORD loved you** and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers

His love for me; His love for you is not dependent on our performance or good deeds or anything about us. It is not an "I love you if you ..." or "I love you because you" It is just an "I love you." It is all about Him! It is based on who He is and not on who we are or what we do. That is a radical concept if you grasp it.

We see this throughout God's word.

Prodigal Son
Woman caught in adultery
Hosea marry a harlot
Jesus with sinners and tax collectors
Thief on the cross

This means that I cannot do good things to make Him love me more, and what I do bad does not make Him love me less. We think in our flesh, in our natural understanding, that it depends on our performance or behavior, as it God will love us more if we do good and less if we do bad. NO! He loves us because of who He is and not because of who we are.

Let me show you a diagram that has been very helpful for me (it is in my tract on Liberating Grace ...

2 concentric circles: inner one is marked "Identity" and the outer one marked "Behavior"

So many need this today because so many come from homes where love was conditional: on good grades, looking a certain way, behaving a certain way, being a good athlete....their behavior in a sense equaled identity... even in the church.

Does this mean that we can just do whatever we want and it doesn't matter? No, it doesn't mean that. In fact, Hebr. 12 says that God disciplines those He loves God loves us no matter what and He loves us so much that He wants to change us.

Ex. Parenting: accept your children right where they are but deal with behavior in a way that separates behavior from identity. God does this with us and we must learn to do this with each other.

TS because of this God's love is therefore:

c. **Secure – Rom. 8:35-39**

Nothing can take it away from us. Because His love is eternal and unconditional, the logical byproduct of this is that no thing or no person can take God's love from us. I find it interesting in this passage:

Rom. 8 (turn with me) that many of the things mentioned are negative:

Tribulation/distress/persecution – “But God, how can you love me and this be happening”

Famine/nakedness – what a trial that would be ... normal to question God then

Death – if you really loved me, this person would not have died.

And yet, none of these can separate us from God's love . But we can separate ourselves? No. You are a created thing and this passage no created thing can separate us from God's love.

His love is secure. Rest in this my friend. Be still and know that He is God!

TS 4th. God's love is:

d. **Immeasurable**

Eph 3:17-19

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to **grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,** 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

I love this phrase I have highlighted: God's love is so wide it has no walls, so long it has no door, so high it has no ceiling, and so deep it has no floor. It is immeasurable. You cannot measure it. It goes in all directions, touches all people, and reaches into all situations, of our lives. There is nothing you are going through or will go through that the love of God is not able to bring you through!!!!

Hymn – “Love of God” v. 3 – my friends that is an awesome insight into the love of God! (sing the refrain?)

(This passage even says that God's love cannot ever be fully understood. Amen. I think one of the adventures of heaven and eternity is that it will take all of eternity to fully grasp the love of God.

TS With all that said, does God just love with words or is there action? Oh, there is action, because:

2. God's love is best demonstrated at the cross.

1 John 4:9-11

9 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.** 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he **loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.**

God is not a big talk, no do God. He is a big talk and big do God. His love is an action verb. He loves with action. He loved in the most excellent of ways. He loves in the most tangible of ways in becoming a man, entering our world, going through what we go through, and then paying the ultimate price

Jn. 15:13 greater love hath no man than this

Rom. 5:8 God demonstrates His own love toward us ...

Quo Grudem: God eternally gives of Himself to others.

Ex. Statue: In St. Paul's Cathedral in London there is a life size marble statue of Jesus on the cross in great pain and anguish and below it is this: "This is how God loved the world."

Ex. Paper and Iran: This week a huge earthquake hit Iran and killed 50,000. One story I read was of a baby they found alive in the arms of its dead mother. The mother died to save the child. Jesus died to save us.

(What makes His love even more amazing is that fact that God died for a people (us) that He knew would still reject Him even after this demonstration of love. It is one thing to sacrifice for someone you know will give back to you, but quite another for those you know will not give back.

Ex. Jewish Legend?

TS As I have already stated, though God's love is unconditional and can't be earned or taken away, this does not mean that our behavior doesn't matter, in fact:

3. God's love results in obedience.

1 John 4:7-8

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

1 John 4:11-12

11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

1 John 4:19-20

19 We love because he first loved us.

Notice how what we have here is that because of God's love we love others. Notice that it is not an abuse of God's love but rather that God's love motivates obedience. This is similar to:

2 Cor. 5 the love of Christ constrains me

Titus 2 the grace of God instructs us to deny ungodliness and to live holy

Rom. 6 shall we sin that grace may increase? May it never be.

This is so much the way God wants the whole Christian experience to work. God to us and us to others. In this passage our obedience is loving others...

Diagram of God to us and us to others.

This is similar to the house diagram that I have used here over the years and it is very appropriate here:

house diagram 1 – the normal one with who God is, the cross as the door, who I am in Christ and what I do

house diagram 2: God is love ... I am loved ... I love

TS Now what I want to do in this final point is take the part of the house where it says “I am loved” and flesh this out and bring it right down to where we live, so our final point is this:

4. God’s love is meant to be experienced.

1 John 4:16-18

16 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. 17 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. 18 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.

Notice the emphasis in these verses on God’s love being something that is experienced and practical and a part of our daily lives. Not just something we know in our heads.

“relying on the love God has for us”. – relying on it for whenever and for whatever we might need.

“living in love” – wow, that is a daily deal, like in Jn. 15 when Jesus says “abide in My love”. It is that word picture of a vine and branches where the branches are connected to and drawing all life from the vine. God’s love is that way for us.

“perfect love drives out fear” – only God’s love is perfect and it can drive out the many fears that we face in our lives. For example:

When you are fearful of doing something new (fear of **failure**) or have a fear of **rejection** in a relationship, knowing God’s love can help you get victory over that fear because you can go into those risky situations knowing that even if you do fail or even if someone does reject you or treat you bad, you can always come running back into the safe arms of God who loves you right where you are. If you do your best and still think you fall short, God is still proud of you and wants to be there to encourage you to keep going. Worse case scenario: someone special to you does reject you or break things off with you, guess what? You still have God and God is always with you and God will always love you and God will not reject you and knowing and receiving these truths and allowing them to percolate to the heart will set you free because **Jn. 8** says the truth will set you free and there is nothing more true than God’s everlasting love for you!!!

Now I know it’s a process and it is not something you just get and never struggle again. In fact:

Quo I know a pastor in Chicago who told me once that he spends about 50% of his time counseling just trying to convince people that God loves them.

Now, as we wrap it up today I want to take a few more minutes to talk to you about how to make this a living reality in your life. Listen carefully because what I share in the next few minutes could radically change your life. Here is how God's unconditional, eternal, never changing, secure, and immeasurable love can impact your life:

- a. When you sin or fall short and repent of that sin, you can be assured that God still loves you and forgives you and accepts you. That sin, no matter what it is, when brought to the cross is under the blood, forgiven, cleansed, wiped away. Thrown as far as the east is from the west. Remind yourself of this. Have some scriptures that you can encourage yourself with. This is part of the renewing of the mind that **Rom. 12** talks about.
- b. Each and every day, **meditate** on these truths and remind yourself of God's love and you will find that this gives you:
- c. **Proper confidence and strength** and **accurate view of self** so that if thoughts come into your head that you are worthless or no good or will never amount to anything (which may have been or being said to you by certain people), you just put those thoughts out of your mind, because that is not God speaking, and you allow God's word and the truths of His love for you to replace those lies (**2 Cor. 10** "take every thought captive ..."). When you do this, it will have a positive impact.
- d. You see the 2 greatest needs that each of us have is for **security** and **significance** and God's love hits the core of both of those needs. Security is the need to be loved and accepted just as we are and only God knows us 100% and accepts us 100%. Significance is the need to know that my life matters and I am not just the product of slimy algae or a social security number. God's love also meets that need because God says we are valuable because we are created in His image.
- e. If you have some **hurts and pains from the past** (abuse or loss or scars from sin), allow God's love to bring healing to you by reassuring you that He hurts with you, that He cares for you, that if you bring that pain to Him, He will begin the process of healing. You have to bring it to Him, though.
- f. This goes for **any need you have**, whether it be a need for strength or direction or come to God, receive His love and help and watch your life change.
- g. If you recognize that you have been on the **performance treadmill** doing all of these things to try to earn God's love and you are getting tired trying to please God, guess what? You can stop doing that. Don't do it to gain points with God. You already have all of His love and acceptance. Rest in His love and allow His love to motivate your good works instead of doing, doing, doing to earn His love.
- h. One very powerful thing about God's love is that we can actually learn to accept our weaknesses and neediness instead of always trying to cover them up. Check out this powerful quote from Brennan Manning:

“God not only loves me as I am, but also knows me as I am. Because of this I don’t need to apply spiritual cosmetics to make myself presentable to Him. I can accept ownership of my poverty and powerlessness and neediness.”

Brennan Manning in The Ragamuffin Gospel

This is a whole new way of living for some of you and I can tell you, it is so freeing to not have to live to try to impress people. Your weaknesses and neediness actually become a pathway to greater closeness with God!

- i. A very practical suggestion is simply to take time to sit back, meditate on some of these truths and just hold your hands up and say “God I receive your love. Thank you that you love me right where I am.”

Quo My tract on Performance?

Pract. Allow God to love you ... open yourself up to His transforming love.

Testimony (Holly Fitting): And now I want you to hear from someone who has begun (emphasis on process) to experience some of what I have talked about today.... Holly

Tell me about your past and how you did not receive love?

How did you look for love in the wrong ways?

What have been the things that have kept you from God's love?

How is God's love changing you (emphasize process and not arriving yet)?

God wants us to experience His powerful love! In what way do you need to experience His love?

Conclusion

Are you in God's love?

Do you know god's love?

Are you experiencing God's love?

Pray/ministry time: for those of you today who see that you need a fresh revelation of God's love and you need to receive God's love in a deeper way, I am going to ask you to come up front and I will want to pray for you as a group **Pray:** give time to receive God's love... open to God giving you a picture or a verse...*pray for one another/ministry team in the corner and along the sides to pray for people*

End:

- **Cards**
- **Men's service – sign up on card**
- **Elmbrook conference**
- **MC this week**
- **Andy**
- **Sexual purity conference**
- **CPR**

Benediction: Before you leave today I want to give you one final thought:
Who does God love the most? Perhaps Jesus?

John 15:9-10

9 "As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Now remain in My love.

John 17:23

23 I in them and You in Me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world
know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me.

Jesus loves us just as much as the Father loved him.

The father loves us just as much as He loves Jesus. Wow.

Go forth to live in this love!