

“We Ought to Love One Another,” 1 John 4:7-21 (Second Sunday After Pentecost, June 3, 2018)

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. <sup>9</sup> In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. <sup>11</sup> Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup> No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

<sup>13</sup> By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

<sup>14</sup> And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

<sup>15</sup> Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. <sup>16</sup> So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. <sup>17</sup> By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. <sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup> If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. <sup>21</sup> And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

## PRAY

Today we finish our five-week study on 1 John. This has not been a comprehensive study – we did not work our way through every verse of this epistle and we didn’t even look at chapter five.

But I wanted to finish with these fifteen verses because in them John the apostle goes into detail about the subject of love, and the statement that perhaps best sums up John’s argument in this passage is verse 11: “<sup>11</sup> Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” Over and over again John says we are to love one another, not just in verse 11 but in verse 7, verse 8, verse 12, verses 19 and 21.

“Love one another” is a good summary not only of 1 John 4 but also of the message of the whole New Testament and, indeed, the whole Bible. In the final analysis, John says, it doesn’t really matter what church you go to as a Christian, and it doesn’t matter how much money you give away to the church, and it doesn’t matter how often you attend that church, and it even doesn’t really matter what you say you believe in terms of doctrine and theology *if it doesn’t result in love for one another*. All of our doctrine and theology and church involvement and personal piety must culminate in love, or *else it’s pretty useless*.

No one could have put this more clearly than the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13: “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.”

Ultimately, nothing is more important than love, and we will look at Christian love this morning and do so under two headings, and then we'll take the Lord's Supper: first, what Christian love is. Second, how we can practice it, how we can do it.

First, what Christian love is. Hollywood has lied to you. They didn't mean to, they honestly didn't know any better. But Hollywood has through ten thousand romantic comedies told you that love is hole – we say things like “I fell in love,” as if love is some place you accidentally fall into.

Hollywood has also told you love is involuntary – you can't choose the person you love, you just wind up loving certain people because you find you feel strongly about them. Love is an emotion, love is a feeling, it's out of our control. Love is a noun, an experience. That's what we've been told through thousands of movies and countless personal anecdotes about how two people met and got together.

But that hole you fall into and that involuntary emotion is infatuation, not love. Now, I'm not knocking infatuation. Infatuation is awesome – when you've had that experience of being infatuated with someone, and that someone else is infatuated with you, it's euphoric. Twenty years ago I experienced infatuation with the woman who would become my wife. Infatuation can lead to love and marriage and all manner of wonderful things, **it rocks**, but it is not in and of itself love.

Because love is not a noun. Love is not primarily a feeling or a hole you fall into, love is something that you do. ***Love is a choice, a decision you make and a consequent action that in some way works for the benefit and good of another person.***

And because love is a choice it's not something reserved only for the person you're going to marry, or your children, or some exceptionally close friend. Rather, you can love someone you don't even know. You can't love someone you don't even like. You can even love your enemies. Jesus says, <sup>32</sup>“If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup>And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. <sup>34</sup>And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. <sup>35</sup>But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.” Luke 6:32-35. Now if by “love your enemies” Jesus meant “feel warm and fuzzy emotions for people who are out to destroy you,” that would be impossible.

But that's not love – it is a decision you make and a consequent action that in some way works for the benefit and good of another person, and you can do that for anyone, *even your enemies*.

So, love is a decision followed by an action. But what is most fundamental to love? It's not an emotion – we've established that. It's not even the actions that result from love, though they are necessary.

What's foundational to love, what is necessary if you are ever going to love one another, is making the decision to see another person.

What do I mean by "seeing" one another? I don't know of a better illustration of this in the Bible than the parable of the good Samaritan. Let's read Luke 12:30-32, where Jesus said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side."

The priest and the Levite walking by saw a man lying on the road, but they didn't see *him*. They saw a problem. That's how Paul Miller puts it in one of his books. They saw a problem, so they did not give the man attention or value him in the moment just for being there. They were willing to pass him by and let him die. I know that when I haven't been loving – when I've ignored others or been harsh, selfish, or impatient – it's been because I haven't really seen the people around me. I've been too focused, like the priest and the Levite, on my agenda for the day. Or been focused on my thoughts or my needs, so people just looked like problems to me.

"<sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him." Luke 12:33-34. The Samaritan looked and he made a decision that he did not see a problem lying in the road – *he saw a person*. He saw a person, and he had compassion for him: he loved him enough to see him, and then he found out what his needs were and then, to the best of his ability, he met them.

Foundational to love is first of all seeing the people around you. This is the question: friends, *do you primarily see people around you or do you primarily see problems around you?*

Selfishness means seeing people either as problems to be ignored or as tools to be used to promote your own interests. Selfishness runs away from difficult people (because they will drain you and get you off track from what you need to do today) and runs to influential, wealthy, and powerful people (because they can help you get ahead in life). But love, biblical love, chooses to see people, give them attention, value them just because they are there and are made in the image of God, then take compassion on them in some way. And it may be that the compassion involves meeting some physical need or taking this person into your life in a more significant way, but most of the time it is enough just to see them. Why? *Because we feel loved when we are seen like that. All of us long to be cherished and to fill someone else's mind and for them to care how we are doing. That is the foundation of love.*

Let's read verse 11 again: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." Who is the "one another" we read about? Typically when I think about the people I need to love, I think about my immediate family. Certainly we are to love our immediate family.

But when John writes "love one another" he's not saying, "Love your wife and kids." He's talking about the church. In fact, there are something like sixty "one another" commands in the

New Testament, depending on how you count them. About fifteen of those commands just say, “Love one another.” Three of them are in our text for today. And they all refer to the church.

Are you doing that? If you are a member at Grace, do you love, do you really see, the people around you in this church? Have you carved out time in your week where you can take just a few of these people, see them, give them attention, find out what’s on their hearts, and love them? Sunday morning worship doesn’t count, by the way, because you can’t see one another during this hour. You’re seeing God in this hour through the prayers and music and sacraments and the Word, but you can’t hear what’s on your neighbor’s heart. Are you? I know it’s hard.

We live, as twenty-first century Americans, in what is in some ways the best environment the world has ever known. We know more than previous generations have known, we communicate more and faster than they could, we have unparalleled purchasing power, we have access to outstanding health care, we have freedoms and opportunities that previous generations never had.

But along with these undoubted benefits come costs. It’s not easy living in this fast-paced, competitive world of ours, where anxiety stalks our lives all the time, where our extended families are scattered to the four winds and we are so unconnected to anything that can readily give our lives meaning, purpose, or even a sense of place.

This culture puts tremendous psychological pressure on us. So much fills our minds, so much that is urgent, so much that demands attention *now*. We are preoccupied with just surviving the moment and building a meaningful life for ourselves. And if you have children, those preoccupations are multiplied, because now you’re not just worried about your own life but also to make sure *your children have lives of their own where they can be successful*. So it is no wonder why twenty percent of Americans are on some kind of psychiatric medication, and I’m sure at least twice that number are self-medicating in unhealthy ways.

In this culture, where it’s so hard to see and love the people we live with, I understand why you might feel like you just don’t have the time to love the people you sit next to on Sunday mornings at Grace. I understand why you might say, “J.D., it’s all I can do just to be here right now. I don’t know how I could carve out more time for anything else.” By the way, we as the elders and staff at Grace Bible haven’t done a great job making it easy for you to be in the position to love one another. Our small group ministry has foundered over the years, but we hope to present some ideas later this summer that can put you in a position to do this with one another. Yet that is the command: we are to love one another in the church.

Second, how can we do it? Before we can see others, we need to see two things ourselves. *First, we need to see how God loves us.* 1 John 4:19: “We love because he first loved us.” We all want to be seen, we all want to be cherished, we all want to fill someone else’s mind so that they care how we are doing every moment of the day. And the Bible says that is precisely what we have in God. “We love because he first loved us.” But how can we know he loves us?

1 John 4:9-10: “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup>In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

God became a man in Jesus Christ, and at the end of his life on earth Jesus Christ died on the cross to be “the propitiation for our sins.” In other words, Jesus died to turn away the anger God rightly stored up for us because of our sins. God loves justice, so he refuses to let evil go unpunished. But God also loves showing mercy, so Jesus sacrificed himself by bearing God’s wrath on sin so we could be saved and receive God’s love and mercy.

A few weeks ago we had another school shooting in our country, this time in Santa Fe, Texas. All the accounts say that one student sacrificed himself to save the lives of some of his classmates. When the shooter came to the door of the art classroom, this one student barred the door and kept the shooter out long enough for his classmates to escape. But it cost him his life, because the shooter shot through the door and killed him.

That student is no doubt a hero, and he loved his classmates by sacrificing himself for them. But here’s what I want you to see: while the student sacrificed himself for people on one side of that door, *Jesus Christ died for the people on both sides of the door*. Jesus didn’t just die for good people; he died for evil people as well. He died for the victims **and** the perpetrators.

Do you know that? Do you know that no matter how good or bad, how loved or how worthless, you think you are, do you know no matter what you’ve done *God loves you in and through Jesus Christ*? I love Romans 5:6-8: “<sup>6</sup>For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup>For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— <sup>8</sup>but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

One of the ways you can know you are a Christian is when you can sympathize with people who do wicked things, like a school shooter. When you can say, “You know, I don’t think I’d ever do anything like that, I certainly pray I don’t, but I know that I need the same thing they need – I am a sinner, I need someone to turn away God’s anger at my sins, I need propitiation for my sins, and that is exactly what I have in Jesus Christ.” If you don’t think that, if you think that you are fundamentally different from people who do evil, you don’t understand the gospel of Jesus Christ because you don’t really see that you’re a sinner.

*Second, we need to see that we’ve already successfully passed our judgment day.* In 1 John 4:17-18 we read about judgement day: that day at the end of the age when we will stand before God and give an account to him for how we lived our lives.

I have a recurring dream, nightmare actually. The nightmare is that I have to go back to high school and take my calculus final. In the nightmare for some reason I didn’t finish that class, the calculus police caught up with me, and now I have to go back and take this test. The problem is I haven’t thought about calculus since 1995. I haven’t used it, haven’t wanted to, I have been extraordinarily successfully at avoiding calculus all these years. But now in the dream I have to take this test, so I start to panic because I don’t have a chance. I know I’m going to flunk this test and that means I’ll have to go back to high school and start my life all over again.

I have some version of this dream once a month. A lot of you also have some version of this dream. All the psychiatrists and counselors tell us that dreams like this (like the dreams of showing up at a party or at work naked) are subconscious expressions of worries and fears. We are afraid of being exposed as frauds, of not measuring up, of being unworthy of love.

Friends, one day we *will* be exposed. Paul in Romans 2:16 calls judgment day “that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.” Maybe if you gave me a few days I could study hard and pass a calculus exam. But if God is going to judge the totality of my life, and he knows all my secrets, every action I’ve ever taken, all the ugly thoughts that have crossed my mind, *how could I possibly pass?*

Yet if you know that Jesus died in your place for your sins, the Bible says, you have nothing to fear: “By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.” 1 John 4:17-18.

John says, “By this is love perfected with us ...” If you want to know how to love one another you must understand John’s argument. John is saying, “You are frauds, you don’t measure up, you haven’t earned God’s love. And left to yourself you’re toast on judgment day. But Jesus came and he lived the life you should have lived, and he died the death you deserved to die – he took all the punishment you deserve on the cross – so now you don’t have to be afraid of judgment day, because on that day God will judge Jesus’ life in your place.”

And if you don’t have to be afraid of judgment day, you don’t have to be afraid of anything in this life between now and then. I don’t remember for sure what grade I received in calculus in high school, but if my teacher had told me at the beginning of the year, “J.D., don’t worry about this class – you’re going to get an A at the end of the year,” (and by the way Mr. Simpson would never have said that), but if he had said that then I wouldn’t have had any worries in the school year leading up to that final exam. I would have known it was going to be fine.

In the same way, John is telling us in verses 17-18 that we don’t have to worry about our lives leading up to judgment day. Judgment day is when you get your final evaluation for how you’ve lived, and if you are sure that on judgment day you’re going to get an A, then ***you don’t have anything to worry about right now***. If you’re going to be happy and God is going to be happy with you at the final exam of your life, that means that all the stuff you’re worried about right now must turn out just fine. Your job, your health, your kids, your finances, your church, your obedience to God’s commands, your hopes and dreams – if you’re happy on judgment day, it must mean that everything turns out just fine. It may look impossible to you now, but if you’re going to be happy then it means God will work it all out.

And that knowledge frees us up to love one another. Jesus is the propitiation for our sins, he died so we can live, and that means we owe him everything. If he tells us to love one another, we must do it. But because we know that on judgment day everything will be just fine, then all the fears and anxieties and selfish ambitions and preoccupations that keep us too busy and too distracted and too selfish to see one another and show compassion vanish, and we’re free to love.

In fact, the more we see that because of Jesus everything is going to turn out just fine, the more we want to see and love one another.

We're going to take the Lord's Supper now. We invite all people who have personally trusted in Jesus Christ to participate, regardless of what church you are a part of and regardless of how you have been baptized. As you take the bread and the cup, remember how much God must love you that he would send his one and only Son to die for you in your place. Think on his love. And then let's resolve in some way to see and love one another. Amen. Let's pray together.