

“GOD IS LOVE.”

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Scripture Texts: I John 4:7-14

Introduction.

The Bible has a lot to say about love, which should tell us something about the One who wrote it.

There is a whole book on romantic love in the OT, The Song of Songs.

There is a whole chapter on love in the NT, I Corinthians 13.

The most famous verse is on love, John 3:16.

John has been called the apostle of love. He loves to talk about love. John writes a lot about love in his Gospel and in his letters.

He mentions love over fifty times in his Gospel (more than other three Gospels put together).

He mentions love almost fifty times (in 26 verses) in this short letter, and 15 times just in our short text (15 times in 6 verses).

John already talked about love in 2:7-11 as a sign one is walking in the light, and in 3:11-24 as evidence one is a child of God. But I John 4:7-12 is the fullest treatment of love. This is another great love chapter in the Bible, and appropriately it begins, Beloved.

God is love, the origin and source of love.

God has loved us.

Twice in I John 4 John says God is love (8, 16). He doesn't say God loves us or that God is loving. He goes above and beyond. God is love.

He doesn't say love is God. You can't reverse the sentence. God is love, but love is not God. We can't worship love, but we can worship God.

He doesn't mean that love is all God is. In chapter one John says God is light. In John 4:24 he says God is spirit. In Hebrews we read God is a consuming fire. The Bible is

a big book and it is a revelation to us of who God is. There is much more we can know and say about God. He is not just love, but He is love.

This is one of the most profound statements in Scripture. Just as climbing a high mountain and gaining a panoramic view of the world below can be an exhilarating experience, so can gaining a true understanding of the love of God. This is high doctrine, this is cause for worship type truth.

God in His very essence and nature is love. Love is central to His character and central to all His actions. It informs and fills everything He does.

Those who are enabled by the Spirit of God to say God is love and have come to know His love in a personal way through Jesus, have one of the very best gifts possible. In fact, since heaven is filled with God and God's love, to know His love here is to have heaven on earth.

The reason I said enabled by the Holy Spirit is because, you cannot know God's love without the Spirit.

Romans 5:5 God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

All love has its origin and source in God. Even the love that nonbelievers have. All humans are made in the image of God and all human love ultimately comes from God whether they recognize it or not.

How do atheists explain love? Where did it come from, how did it evolve, how does it fit with the selfish and self-centered notion of survival of the fittest?

All people even in their sinful depravity will still reflect in some ways their creator. But their love will fall short and end up as sin if they fail to love the supreme object of all our affections and if they fail to honor the greatest commandment of all, to love God with all we are and have.

Jesus is the proof of God's love, the evidence, the manifestation.

People say talk is cheap, that the proof is in the pudding. God is love. Prove it.

Having said God is love, John backs up that claim with proof. He no doubt could have listed any number of proofs or evidences.

He could have mentioned the creation of the universe and all we enjoy on this planet. He could have pointed to how God gave us dominion over all things. He could have reminded us of all the countless temporal and spiritual blessings that are ours. He could have repeated how God has continually and constantly preserved us and protected us.

But John passes over all of those and many more to go to the supreme proof, the chief evidence, the greatest possible manifestation of God's great and free love for us. This proof transcends and trumps all others.

God is not just emotion, not just vague feelings, He is love and love does, love acts. Love finds its most supreme expression in the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ.

He says it three different ways in three verses, 9, 10, 14

I John 4:9 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.

God didn't send an angel. He didn't send one of His Sons. He only has one Son and He sent Him. In fact, John emphasizes the point by saying He sent His one and only unique Son

And God gives us life through Him. Though we were dead, yet through Him we live.

I John 4:10 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.

He didn't just send His Son but sent His Son to die. Not just to teach or heal, but to die. And not just die for righteous people or good people or nice or kind or pretty people, but for sinners.

John uses a special word here, *propitiation*, a term rich in theological meaning and depth. It only occurs four times in the NT, twice in this letter (see I John 2:2).

Propitiation refers to Christ's sacrifice by death for the sins of the world in order to take away the enmity between God and us and appease God and restore His favor toward us.

John emphasizes this depth of God's love by saying God did this for His enemies, while we were completely alienated from God, as those who deserved His wrath for our sins. God took the initiative by first loving the ungodly.

Propitiation tells us several truths about God.

God personally hates sin.

Sin is very serious.

God's great love is seen when He personally provides a way to deal with the seriousness of sin.

God's holiness required satisfaction and God's love provided satisfaction.

God is pleased with Christ's sacrifice and fully satisfied by it and accepts it as a substitute for us.

Jesus is the wrath bearing substitute for our wretchedness making God propitious toward us. God is now pro-us, for us.

Jesus lived the life that we should have lived and died the death we should have died, so God can be reconciled to us and live in us.

The measure of love is seen in what it cost. True nature of love is seen in sacrifice. There is no parallel to this outside of Christianity. Only in the coming of Jesus has the world seen what true love looks like.

I John 4:14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

This is a staggering display of love. This should give us chills or goosebumps every time we think of it.

How do you know God is love and God loves you? God did not spare His own Son but sent Him to die for you. If He did that, what more is He not willing to do for you? Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down his life for another.

The cross is the "everlasting monument to the truth that our God is love" (Daniel Akin).

"Amazing love! how can it be that thou my God, shouldst die for me?"

The greatness of love is seen in four ways, by what it cost Him, by how little we deserved it, by how much we benefited, and by how freely He did it. Everything about this declares loudly, God is love.

So, God is love and God has shown His love to us in Jesus. So, what? Or now what?

**Love for others is our response to God's love in Jesus.
We should love others.**

I John 4:11-12 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

Again, Beloved. My dearest friends.

If God has so loved us, then we ought to love each other. This has been John's repeated theme throughout the letter (3:11, 14, 23; 4:7, 8, 11, 12, 20, 21).

Because God is love, we ought to love each other. It is the proof we love God and know God's love. If we don't love others, then we can't say truthfully that we love God.

In logic this is called arguing from the greater to the lessor. If God loves us in the way He does and is the source of all love, then we certainly should love each other. Give what you have received.

God's love is our example for brotherly love. As God freely loved so should we freely love, not because we are loved back, not because it is convenient or will benefit us in some way, but freely as God has loved us.

Some of you get nervous thinking about talking to others about your faith. You can start by loving them. When you love others, you are revealing God to them. The unseen God is made visible for others to see when we love others. Our love for each other is evidence there is a God who is love. And if they ask us why we love, then the opportunity is there to point to Jesus, who has shown us the love of the Father.

How is love perfected in us by loving others?

Perfected means proved, shown to be real. It also means brought to completion, reaching its intended goal, coming to maturity. We show God's love is in us when it

comes out to others. There is a cause and effect, God's love is the cause, our love for others is the effect.

To love each other is like loving God. The two commandments cannot be separated. You haven't done one if you haven't done the other. If you don't love your brother, then you don't love God.

Implications and application.

God is love is a very simple statement. On the face of it, it is easy to understand. What more needs to be said really. God is love.

Let me sum it up in other words. God is love and that means that it is in His very nature to be a giver, because love is giving, not selfish and self-centered. God is by nature a giver, an overflowing inexhaustible river. He is so full that He is never in need and always overflowing to us.

We have not and cannot plumb the breadth, length, height or depth of it. We have not fully experienced all that it means.

Our closing hymn makes this point beautifully. This is one of my favorite pictures painted in words.

Could we with ink the ocean fill and were the skies of parchment made,
Were ev'ry stalk on earth a quill and ev'ry man a scribe by trade
To write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry,
Nor could the scroll contain the whole tho stretched from sky to sky.
(The Love of God by Frederick M. Lehman)

Prayer: Almighty and merciful God, we praise you for the greatness of your love and for the incredible reflection of that love in Your Son, our Savior, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the whole world. We rejoice at your gift. May your great love to us make our witness more bold, our love more unconditional.

Ephesians 3:18-21 [Grant that we] may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.