

Love

Rev. Michael J. Mattil

We've made it through another **Valentine's Day**, a favorite time of year for jewelers and florists and candy stores. I was somewhat amused by one of the television ads I saw this year. A candy maker had a commercial in which a guy on the street was telling the interviewer that if he didn't bring home flowers and chocolates, he would be in trouble, big trouble. The message seemed to be that "Love means you can be guilted into buying something." It is a marketing ploy, to be sure, but it also reminds us that for the most part, the world around us does not understand the meaning of love as it is conveyed to us in God's Word. Because our society has been focused on love, this is a good time for the followers of Christ to speak about true love, what it is and what it means.

1 John 4:7-11 [7] Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. [8] Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. [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. [11] Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

I. God is Love

A. Reveals self to us in Scripture

A Frenchman was crossing the desert with an Arab guide. Each day at **sunset**, the Arab knelt on the burning sand and called upon his God. After this had gone on for many days, the unbelieving Frenchman asked his Arab guide, "How do you know there is a God?" The guide thought for a moment and then asked, "This morning, how did we know it was a camel that passed by our tent while we slept during the night, and not a man?" The Frenchman laughed and said, "You could tell it by the print in the sand. That was not the footprint of a man!" The Arab looked to the West, where the setting sun filled the heavens with reds and yellows and purples, and he said, "Neither is that the footprint of a man."

That Arab confirmed what the Bible itself says about God: ***The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands*** (Psalm 19:1). What he did not know was who the true God is. And that is not something you can discover from the beauty of a sunset or the

intricacies of an atom. The only way to know the true God is to turn to the pages of His Holy Word. Nature may tell us there is a God, but Scripture tells us who He is. The footprints of a setting sun, a mighty oak and the roaring waves may tell us God exists. But the nailprints in the hands of our Redeemer tell us who God is, that God is Love. We get that message from His Word.

B. Love is His essence

When we turn to the Scripture and ask the question, “who is God?” the most complete answer comes to us in that one word: **LOVE**. True, He is the Creator who made everything, who still preserves and cares for it all, but all this is done from His love. And from the pages of the Bible we discover that so much more was done from His love. When God looked down on a world groping in sin, people completely estranged from Him with no good in themselves whatsoever, He could have rightfully turned away in disgust and revulsion. Instead, He decided to show His true nature by sending His love down to us in a tangible form. An old hymn speaks of that: **Love Divine, all love excelling, Joy of heav'n to earth come down** (TLH 351 v. 1) God in all His love is seen in the form of **Jesus Christ**, assuming our humanity through the Virgin birth, suffering for our wrongs, dying as our substitute, taking the punishment we so justly deserve. When Jesus willingly ascended the cross on that hill outside of Jerusalem, He revealed Himself to be the highest expression of love and kindness, grace and mercy.

II. Those who know God will love

Our text says that **those who know God will love**, and that those who do not know God will not love. This passage is speaking of more than intellectual knowledge. It is not the accumulation of factual information about the Triune God that will lead you to show the kind of love God has shown. Mere knowledge will not have that kind of life-altering effect on you. When John spoke of those who “know God” here, he was using that word the same way it is used in what is one of my favorite hymns: **I Know That My Redeemer Lives**. I know that Jesus died and rose again for me. I believe without a shadow of a doubt that for Jesus’ sake, God has blotted out my sins and gives me righteousness instead. That confidence and faith makes me want to love as God has loved me.

This love we are speaking of is an action word. It is evidenced in what we say and do. It is a description of how we should live. A teacher of the Law once asked Jesus “What is the greatest commandment?”

Matthew 22:37-39 Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’”

Love God and love your neighbor is the summary of how God would have us live. Paul summarized it in even briefer fashion in Romans: ***love is the fulfillment of the law*** (Romans 13:10). It has been said in various ways down through the centuries that if you could keep the First Commandment perfectly, there would be no need for the other nine. One of the early Church Fathers, a man named Augustine, put it this way: **Love God and do whatever you want.** That is the life to which you have been called. If everything you do is influenced by your love for God, there will be no more sin. Love God, and then do whatever you want.

III. Pointed in the right direction

The love that the world was describing in connection with the holiday this past week is not what I have just been describing. Instead of loving God first and letting that influence everything else, so much of what this world calls “love” is misdirected. I’m sure most of you have heard the expression, “Be careful where you point that thing!” It can be spoken of a water hose or a loaded weapon or anything that might discharge and hurt someone. I think it is appropriate to remember those words in connection with this command to love. **Be careful where you point your love.**

Don’t point it at yourself first. That kind of selfish attitude puts yourself in the position that God should have. There was a popular song a while back entitled “The Greatest Love” and it actually said, “learning to love yourself is the greatest love of all.” I would beg to differ. The greatest love is what John wrote about in our text

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Don’t direct your love toward this world and its things. They are just things that don’t last. We can enjoy and use them, but they should be kept in proper perspective.

That hymn I mentioned earlier, Love Divine, All Love Excelling, has a line that mentions another “don’t.” It says: Take away the love of sinning. Sometimes we get so wrapped up in our sins that they become our first love, as it were. We let them consume and control us, rather than the love of God. Satan wants you to love sinning instead of loving God and others.

So often we point our love in the wrong direction. Our love is pointed in the right direction when it makes **God number one** in position and importance. And we do that because we know that His love was already pointed our way.

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Christ has paid for sin. Your sin. God’s incredible love did not spare His only Son, but gave Him up that you might be saved from death. He died for you. He rose again to open heaven for you. You have experienced God’s love in Christ. The proper response for Christians is

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