

# God is ... LOVE

God is ... #1 – Pastor Jonathan Combs – Memorial Day – May 26th, 2024 – 1 John 4:7-12

**INTRO:** Good morning church! Happy Memorial Day! We are truly thankful and honor our military men and women who lost their lives in service of our nation. Every quality of mankind, the sacrifice, the love, the courage is a reflexion of the divine qualities of God. This makes today an appropriate day to begin a new sermon series where we explore how to know God by getting to know who His divine characteristics. This week, we will start with the one from which all of His other attributes flow ... God is Love.

**Series theme verse:** John 17:3 (ESV) And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

The famous theologian and author J. I. Packer in his book *Knowing God* said,

“What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we set ourselves in life? To know God... Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfolded, as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you. This way you can waste your life and lose your soul.” — Packer, J. I., *Knowing God* (p. 19, 33).

Now full disclosure, we are not going to cover everything about who God is, that is a life's pursuit and not one that we could achieve in 8 years much less 8 weeks. That said, we are building off of a foundation that God is triune ... that He has eternally existed as one God, three persons ... the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Trinity itself is a massive undertaking and not the focus of this series however all of His divine qualities are shaped by the way in which God reveals Himself in the Trinity. As we will see today, God's love is revealed to us in a triune way.

**Need:** To begin with the truth that God is love is a perfect starting point for us. I can say with strong conviction that we need to love and be loved. Perhaps there are other qualities that we could disagree on as to whether we need them or not, but love is universal. As the great philosophers The Beatles once sang, “All you need is love, love, love is all you need.”

Psychologist John Bowlby, the father of the attachment theory of love, states that the type of attachment style one develops through their childhood relationship with their caregiver plays a role in one's relationships in adulthood. In essence the way we were loved as children impacts our relationships as adults. He built his work on a premise that seems to be universally accepted in his field ... that we come into this world with an intrinsic need to be loved.

Maybe for you today this truth is a tragic reality. We need love but feel unloved. Maybe this began early for many of us, from early childhood memories we've felt unloved. Maybe this affected our relationships as adults. Maybe he said, “Til death do us part,” but he left. Maybe she promised to love you “in sickness and in health,” but ever since your injury, she has been unloving. Maybe you confided in a dear friend about your deepest pain and they turned it into gossip in your life. Church, we all have some baggage like this, we have all felt rejected or unloved. The very people who need love hurt the people who need love.

**Trans:** But God's love is perfect. When others leave He stays, through your quirks and mistakes and messes. God is love and His motivation and action is always love.

**BODY:** In the book of 1 John, the apostle encouraged believers to know that God is love and to respond with loving one another. We can know that God is love and respond in love. How do we know that God is love and respond in love? The text gives three proofs that God is love which inspire us to love one another.

**TEXT:** 1 John 4:7-12 (ESV) <sup>7</sup> 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.

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## We can know that God is love and respond in love because ...

### 1. God the Father sends.

**EXP:** (7-9) Here we see right away the theological truth that John is building upon namely that God is Love and that we must know God in order to live according to His purpose. Then comes the first of three proofs for that truth. We also see the results or outpouring in the believer's life of accepting this truth.

**"Knows" (7-8)** (γινώσκω, *ginōskō*) - to learn to know, come to know, get a knowledge of perceive, feel.

**"Beloved" (7)** (ἀγαπητός, *agapētos*) - beloved, esteemed, dear, favorite, worthy of love, dearly beloved. John here addresses believers as beloved not only because John loves them, but God does as well. The apostle is well aged at this point, likely in his 80s and I can feel that sweetness coming through the pages like a dear grandfather to his grandkids.

**"Love" (7) (13x)** (ἀγαπάω, *agapaō*) - to love dearly; to be well pleased, to be contented at or with a thing; unconditionally love. Every time this word is used in this passage, it describes the sacrificial love of God. This is most certainly the key word or theme of this text. Also notice that the inverse is not necessarily true: God is Love, but love is not God.

**"Born" (7)** (γεννάω, *gennaō*) - to be born, to be begotten; of men who fathered children or women giving birth to children. To love like God loves is clear indication of the new creation in Christ Jesus, of the born again status.

**"Manifest" (9)** (φανερόω, *phaneroō*) - to make manifest or visible or known what has been hidden or unknown, to manifest, whether by words, or deeds, or in any other way. I like the way the NLT paraphrases this idea of manifesting:

1 John 4:9 (NLT) God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him.

**"Sent" (9-10)** (ἀποστέλλω, *apostellō*) - to order (one) to go to a place appointed **"Only Son" (9)** (μονογενής, *monogenēs*) - only begotten, only, only child, single of its kind.

**"Live through Him" (9)** (ζάω, *zāō*) - to live, breathe, be among the living (not lifeless, not dead); to enjoy real life.

**ARG:** **God's love is displayed in that He gave and sent His only son to us:**

John 3:16-17 (ESV) For God so loved the world, that he **gave** his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not **send** his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

**God sent His Son so that we might be redeemed and adopted into His family:**

Galatians 4:4-5 (ESV) But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

**God's love is humble to the point of a servant, in the incarnation, a very part of His own creation:**

Philippians 2:6-8 (NLT) Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.

**ILL:** I do not know if you've ever met someone famous, but we have a tendency to really remember that event and how the person interacted with us. Maybe they were cordial, down to earth, easy-going or maybe they

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were flippant with you and moved on quickly. Imagine though that the most important person in the universe has all the time in the world for you. They are fully available and present, their love doesn't shrink back at trouble but goes out in power.

**APP:** Love one another, but realize that we will not be able to love with God's perfect love. Some in the sound of my voice don't feel that they are loved. God's love is present and available to you and He wants a relationship with you. He wants you to be in relationship with others.

## 2. God the Son saves.

**EXP:** (10) Here we see the second proof that God is love - that Jesus died for us. But why did Jesus have to die? This is because we loved our own sin so much that we would risk an eternity without God to keep it, but God loved us so much that we don't have to reap the consequences. Jesus willingly took a cruel death on the cross to pay the price for our sin, and in doing so, demonstrated His supreme love for mankind. This also demonstrates that God's agape love started out in one direction; it was not returned at first; God loved, and He acted by sending Jesus as a perfect sacrifice to reconcile us to Him.

**"Propitiation"** (10) (ἱλασμός, *hilasmos*) - the means of appeasing, atonement. Why is propitiation required? Rom 3:23, Rom 6:23. We were enemies of God, but by His grace we were given mercy.

**"Sins"** (10) (ἁμαρτία, *hamartia*) - to miss the mark, to err, be mistaken, to wander from the law of God, violate God's law

"God interposed his own Son to reconcile himself to us, because he loved us; but this love was hid, because we were in the meantime enemies to God, continually provoking his wrath." - John Calvin

This is another example of the sacrificial love of God, or love in action, not just word.

**ARG:** **An amazing part of God's love for us is that He loved us when we despised Him. He came and died for a people and for us when we didn't even want Him:**

Romans 5:8 (ESV) but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV) For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**His sacrifice shows the magnitude of his love for us:**

John 15:13 (ESV) Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.

**ILL:** **Medal of Honor recipient, Garfield McConnell Langhorn, for his sacrifice in Vietnam:** Pfc. Langhorn distinguished himself while serving as a radio operator with Troop C, near Plei Djereng in Pleiku Province. Pfc. Langhorn's platoon was inserted into a landing zone to rescue two pilots of a Cobra helicopter shot down by enemy fire on a heavily timbered slope. He provided radio coordination with the command-and-control aircraft overhead while the troops hacked their way through dense undergrowth to the wreckage, where both aviators were found dead. As the men were taking the bodies to a pickup site, they suddenly came under intense fire from North Vietnamese soldiers in camouflaged bunkers to the front and right flank, and within minutes they were surrounded. Pfc. Langhorn immediately radioed for help from the orbiting gunships, which began to place minigun and rocket fire on the aggressors. He then lay between the platoon leader and another man, operating the radio and providing covering fire for the wounded who had been moved to the center of the small perimeter. Darkness soon fell, making it impossible for the gunships to give accurate support, and the aggressors began to probe the perimeter. An enemy hand grenade landed in front of Pfc. Langhorn and a few feet from personnel who had become casualties. Choosing to protect these wounded, he unhesitatingly threw himself on the grenade, scooped it beneath his body, and absorbed the blast. By sacrificing himself, he saved the lives of his comrades. Pfc. Langhorn's extraordinary heroism at the cost of his life was in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit on himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army.



**APP:** Have you experienced the love of God that comes from receiving His Son as Savior? Would you like to know God better? Recognize that all of us have sinned and continually need a Savior. Accept His atoning sacrifice.

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## 3. God the Spirit abides.

**EXP:** (11-12) Lastly, the 3rd proof of the truth that God is love. He abides in us and is ever-present in our lives after salvation in Jesus. This is one of the amazing blessings of the new life in Christ is that God now resides in us. He does this through His Holy Spirit.

**“Ought to” (11)** (ὀφείλω, *opheilō*) - ought, to owe, to owe money, be in debt for; that which is due, the debt

We can see from John’s use of “ought” that because God first loved us, we owe the debt of love to one another. This is a debt that needs to be paid. Pay it forward with the sacrificial love in action that God demonstrates.

**“No one has ever seen” (12)** (θεάομαι, *theomai*) - to behold, look upon, view attentively, contemplate (often used of public shows)

**“Abides” (12)** (μένω, *menō*) - to remain, to continue to be present, to continue to be, not to perish, to last, endure.

Here we can see a clear picture of the Holy Spirit taking residence in the believer. One of the first manifestations of the Spirit in the life of a new believer is love. As Paul said in 1Corinthians 13:2 ‘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.’

**“Perfected” (12)** (τελειόω, *teleiōō*) - to carry through completely, to accomplish, finish, bring to an end, add what is yet wanting in order to render a thing full

**ARG:** **The gift of the Holy Spirit is our evidence that God abides in us:**

1 John 3:24 (ESV) Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

**The Holy Spirit moves the proofs of God’s love from head to heart:**

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

**God’s love abides in us, it remains in us, and nothing can separate us from His love:**

Romans 8:38-39 (NLT) And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**ILL:**

**APP:** God’s love is present, it is sent, and it has set us free through the blood of Jesus. But equally as wonderful is the fact that God’s love perseveres, it remains, it abides in us. Some of you may feel abandoned, may feel the weight of a lot of love lost. People sometimes leave when things get tough. But the beauty of the Spirit of God is that it abides in us. When God seeks and saves us, He also seals us with the promised Holy Spirit. His love remains on us forever. My friend you are loved by God and nothing can separate you.

So let your love for one another persevere. Have the kind of love for others that sticks around, that doesn’t leave when times get hard or sin enters the camp.

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**CONCLUSION:** Our God is truly love. In the very area of our greatest need, He is far more than enough. He has put His love on display by sending, by saving and by abiding in us. God is not only love but love in action. Will you receive His love and put your life in submission to His will? Will you love one another as He has commanded?

Let's pray.