

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.” Love is central to what it means to be a Christian. The love of God in Christ Jesus transforms our hearts for us to love one another. **THE FATHER SENDS US JESUS TO SHOW US TRUE LOVE.**

We continue our sermon series from 1 John, and we reach the second half of our series, God is Love. Today we will highlight that it is central to find love in God alone and nowhere else, next week we will discuss the proof that God loves us, and we will finish our series with how we can share that testimony with others.

Unfortunately, however, I. The world around us uses "love" to learn about God. In 1 John 4:8 we read, **“Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”** Indeed, our sermon series is titled God is love. In other words, we can learn from the God who is revealed in the Bible what true love is. We can go from the higher to then learn about the lower.

Unfortunately, we try to go from the lower to make assumptions about the higher. We say love is God. But when we say love is God, we import our fallen ideas of what love is into who we think God should be.

In our society, love is God. Because of this, otherwise faithful Christians might criticize their pastors when the pastor lovingly calls a couple to repentance that is living together and sleeping together before marriage. Someone might say, “Pastor, can’t you see they love each other, why would you ask them to move apart?”

In our society, love is God. In a social media post late last month that got over 200,000 views and 40,000 likes, a local pastor argued that since Jesus supposedly said nothing about premarital sex, it is a matter of moral indifference in Christianity, and a way that we can be more compassionate is by tending to more important matters of morality that Jesus discusses such as hoarding wealth.

Unanchored from any Biblical concept of love, the “love” our society upholds is misguided. “Love” turns into a selfish following after our passions. Love becomes romantic lust whose only guideline is I’m okay with it if you’re okay with it. We take these misguided ideas of love and then assume this must be how God operates because He must be just like us.

But II. Jesus' propitiation shows us what it means to love. John tells us what love is: **“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.”** Jesus’ self-sacrificial love shows us what love is. We want to take our concept of love and plug it into how God should be, but God does the reverse. He show us love through His Son.

The word propitiation is a loaded term in the Bible and refers to the sacrifices of animals that would be made to pay for the wrongs that people had done against God. God’s people would right wrongs by paying for a sin through an animal sacrifice.

God loves us, but in our sinful nature, we don't love God. Our sinful actions are a way of showing hatred toward God. As we consider God's laws as expressed by the ten commandments, we see how God wishes for us to love one another. The one who is perfectly compassionate is the one who can keep the Ten Commandments to love God perfectly, not taking the name of the Lord in vain, remembering the Sabbath Day by spending time in devotion to God, by honoring parents, by loving our neighbors perfectly, by keeping sexually pure, by honoring the money and possessions of others, by speaking well of others, and by not being jealous of the possessions and people in the lives of others. The Father uses these as data points to paint us the picture of true compassion and love.

While it is true that hoarding money is a sin and unloving as we read earlier in John, **“But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?”**

Likewise, we fail to show compassion to our neighbor when we engage in premarital or extramarital sex. To quote the words of our Lord Jesus, **“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”** What's more, our Lord Jesus Christ warns us, **“But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”** Jesus upholds marriage as a blessed estate, and He teaches that sex is part and parcel of God joining man and woman together.

When we lessen God's commands in the sixth commandment, “You Shall Not Commit Adultery” through teaching that premarital cohabitation is okay, or through teaching that sex outside of marriage is okay, we are buying into the spirit of the world and false prophets that John warns us against at the beginning of chapter 4. By making these compromises, we are not being loving or compassionate, but we are being unloving and uncaring as we are condoning behaviors that ultimately go against God's will.

Yet God being love means that Jesus Christ has paid the penalty as our atonement for sin. Jesus forgives the woman caught in the act of adultery, and tells her to sin no more. Jesus forgives us for our acts of hatred and unlovingness toward others. He forgives us for all our sins against the ten commandments, including those against the sixth commandment.

The image of propitiation is that of covering over. Jesus not only forgives our sins, He covers over them. He lived the perfect life for us, and His perfection is credited to our account. He loved God completely. He called upon God in the day of trouble. He remembered the Sabbath Day by keeping it Holy. He honored His parents. He loved his neighbors perfectly and never once hated them, even those who sought to murder Him. He lived a pure and chaste life for you treating women

as sisters and never burning in lust for others. He never stole what wasn't His and worked to improve His neighbor's possessions and income. He never told a lie and used His mouth to build up rather than to gossip. He never was jealous for those things and people who weren't His. This living according to the Ten Commandments shows us true love. This living according to God's Law shows us the Love of God which is greater than any of our fallen human conceptions of love.

III. The Holy Spirit uses the means of grace to love one another. This is how we have confidence despite our acts of unlovingness. **“By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.”** The Holy Spirit works through the Word and through the Sacraments to enliven us to confess that Jesus is Lord. From this confession flows our ability to live through Him. Our ability to love flows from God first loving us in Christ Jesus.

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.” There may be many of us who live with guilty consciences over sinful choices we made in the past with a boyfriend or girlfriend. The solution is not to justify our actions, but confess our sins, acknowledge it was a sin, receive Christ's ample forgiveness, and seek to make things right.

It is a loving action to tell a boyfriend or girlfriend you want to live a chaste and decent life and stop doing the things the Lord has reserved for married couples. Even if this means he breaks up with you, you are showing Him God's love as you refuse to engage in behavior that is harmful to your future spouses.

It is a loving action for a couple living together to move out before marriage, even if they are engaged, even if it seems counterintuitive. Both the church and secular sociology teaches us that cohabitating couples increase their risk of divorce down the road.

To have God abide in you means that we confess Jesus as Lord and that means that we follow Jesus wherever He may lead us. He gives us ample forgiveness for where we fail to love others, and He gives us His Spirit strengthened by the Word and Sacrament to love others. Love may not look like we see on television because the world does not have a perfect picture of what love is. God is love, love isn't God, and we look to Jesus Christ to show us true love through His birth, life, death, and resurrection. Amen!