

## **God is Love**

### **By David Feddes**

We're going to focus on 1 John 4:7-21, one of the supreme passages in the whole Bible, which includes the marvelous statement, "God is love." Before we get into the passage itself, I just want to take note of how John addresses the people to whom he's writing. Over and over again, he calls them "beloved" (6 times) and "children" (9 times). Why does John do this? Well, he calls them "beloved" because he loves them, but also because they are loved by God. He calls them "children" because they're his spiritual children and he's their father in faith, but also because they are children of God. John writes,

Beloved, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 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. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: 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. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

## **Supreme Splendor**

I don't know how many of you have been to Glacier National Park, but when you go to Glacier, you see some splendid sights. You see mountains looming, beautiful lakes, and waterfalls. As you drive up the "Going to the Sun Road, it winds up and then up some more, and then up some more. Every time you go around another turn on that upward winding road, you see greater and greater sights. The view gets more and more splendid. Eventually you reach Logan Pass, the highest point on that road, and you see an awesome view of mountain splendor. You say, "It can't get any better than this." But then you start hiking. You go past some mountain goats beside the path. You walk to the top of a ridge, and then you see it. You see Hidden Lake. You see spectacular mountains looming behind it. And you realize that you are now gazing at the most magnificent place of all.

As you read the Bible and as you read 1 John, you see many wondrous views of God's splendor. But then you reach Hidden Lake--you reach "God is love." And you realize that you can't go any higher than that. You don't find anything more beautiful than that.

"God is love." You are now past the outer courts of the temple. You are past the holy place, and you are into the Holy of Holies where God himself dwells. You are at the very mercy seat where God makes propitiation for our sins and shows the depths of who he really is. In his inmost being, God is love.

There are no greater words spoken in any language than the words of this passage. If you had to take one page out of all of the world's literature and lose all the rest, this is probably the one to keep. Because not only does it say "God is love," but it shows who God is in his inmost being. It shows what God has done and how he shows his love in the giving of his Son at the cross and the outpouring of love in the Holy Spirit given into our hearts. It shows that the whole substance of real life and of joy is to love God and to love others fueled by the love of God. It's all here. The rest of the Bible is always wonderful as well. There are other passages that do rise to similar heights, but it's all here. If you want to know God and what he has done and what it means to relate to him and to other people, know this passage and know this God, and you will know the innermost reality of God's life.

I want to focus with you on three main facts that come out in this passage.

- God is Trinity.
- God shows love.
- God fuels love.

First is one that we've talked about before, and I'm not going to spend as much time on as I otherwise would. But the statement "God is love" means that God is Trinity. It also indicates that God doesn't just keep that love to himself or within his own being, but he displays his love, he shows his love, he gives his love out to us. As he does that, the fact that he is love and he shows his love to us fuels our love for him and for each other. Once again, it's a pretty simple statement in one sense that God is love, and within it contains all the greatest realities in the world.

If you read 1 John and you were a beginning student in Greek, you would love 1 John not because of the truths that are in it but because it is the easiest book in the Bible to read if you're trying to read that language. It uses barely over 300 words in its vocabulary. Now, the Bible has more than 5,000 words in the vocabulary of the Bible. 1 John has only 300 different words. With that very small vocabulary, he reveals the depths and the wonder of God.

### **God is Trinity**

- God is Father, Son, and Spirit.
- Three are one in love and being.
- Never is God unloved or unloving.
- Never can hate defeat Love.
- Infinite Love is ultimate reality.

First of all, the fact that God is love stems from the reality of God the Trinity. God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and there are three who are one in love and in being. The Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father, the love of the Holy Spirit is within that life of the Trinity. So God is forever love. Before creating anything, before any other creatures existed to love, God is loving, and God is love.

There has never been a time when God was unloved because the Father was always loved by the Son and Spirit. The Son was always loved by the Father and Spirit. The Spirit was always loved by the Father and Son. Before ever anything exists, never is God unloved, and never is God unloving. There's never a time when God did not love, or when he had nobody to love, because, within the Trinity, God always has the other persons of the Trinity to love and who supremely merit that love. God is never unloved, God is never unloving. He is constantly loving from everlasting to everlasting, apart from all the beings that he's made.

This means that hate can never defeat love because God is the ultimate reality. God is the one from whom all things come. God is the one to whom all things must answer.

Sometimes we think, "Oh, we live in this dog-eat-dog situation where if you're realistic about it, you're going to step on some people, you're going to violate love because we know nice guys finish last. Love loses. Love is for losers. Those who get ahead are the ones who know how to get beyond all of that sentimental stuff and do what needs doing." But the reality that God is Trinity and that God is love means that when many other things lie in ashes, God remains supreme. Love wins.

I don't know how many of you read the old classics, but if you read Dante's "Divine Comedy," when he speaks of paradise, the very last line of that epic poem is, "The love that moves the sun and all the stars." When you look at the galaxies and when you see the vastness of space and the heavens declaring the glory of God, and you think of God, he is the love that moves the sun and all the stars. All of that is moved not by abstract, dead laws of nature. It is the love of God that moves the sun and all the stars. Because that infinite love is ultimate reality, nothing can detract from or add to or defeat God. He's God, and he's love.

One author says the whole Old Testament is written to explain the word "God," and the whole New Testament is written to explain the word "love." That's a bit of an oversimplification, but when you think of the majesty and might and the power of God that's revealed, and when you think then that this God of might and majesty of power is also love, then you realize it's just silly to think that love is going to lose. So don't think you live in a world and in a situation where you've got to look out for yourself. Don't think that being out to win for yourself, "me, myself, and I," is how life is. That's how death is, and that is the world that is passing away. But God remains. Infinite love is ultimate reality. That's good news.

### **God shows love**

Not only is God Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and infinite majesty, power, and love, but he is a God who shows that love.

- Father gives us his all.
- Jesus paid our penalty.
- Spirit lives inside us.
- We flourish by trusting the love God shows us.

"This is how God shows his love among us," John says. He's a God who reveals it: he gives love. God revealed his love partly in creating others to love and to love him, and he, in his creation, displays love already. The Psalms are beautiful in that regard. Psalm 36 says,

Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep. O Lord, you preserve both man and beast. How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low find refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them to drink from your river of delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light, we see light. Continue your love to those who know you.

What a statement! And this was written before God gave the supreme revelation and demonstration of his love. That's just looking at what God does in created things and his kindness to the animals, his kindness to people in giving us life and things we enjoy. As the apostle Paul once put it, "He fills your stomachs with food and your hearts with joy." He does that so that perhaps you'll react, reach out for him, and find him, though he's not far from any one of us, because in him we live and move and have our being. So he's always sending these signals. Every pleasure and every good thing you have in life, everything you enjoy doing is a gift from God. "Every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of lights." It's an outpouring of the God of love upon his creatures--and that's not even the main way he shows his love.

Scripture says, "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." The logic of that is, in the being of the Trinity, it is impossible for God the Father to love anything more than the beloved Son. It is impossible for anything to be more beautiful to him or more marvelous than his own beloved Son. He gave that Son, and the Bible says, "He who did not hold back his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32) The Father gives us his all. "All things are yours," says the Scripture, because God gave Christ. "He sent his one and only Son into the world so that we could have life through him."

Then John repeats it a little differently and brings out the fullness of that. He says, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as the propitiation or the atoning sacrifice for our sins." That means that Jesus took our penalty upon himself and suffered all that the entire world and all of its people and all of its wickedness deserved. He absorbed it into himself, and he took upon himself the penalty for our sins.

Some people try to say, "Oh, that's just a story about child abuse. An abusive father beats up his son and then says, 'Now everything is good for you guys.'" But they don't understand the Trinity at all. When God gives his Son, he's giving himself. God is taking upon himself all the woes and wickedness of the world, not shoveling it off on somebody else that he can then abuse. Jesus paid

our penalty. He's the propitiation. He's the one who takes the rightful wrath against sin and bears it himself and turns it aside from us.

Love sometimes sees something attractive in somebody else and is just drawn to it. But sometimes there's love that just goes out because of a great need that somebody else has, and sometimes that love takes the form of mercy. But sometimes love goes beyond just giving somebody something because they need something and gives them the opposite of what they deserve. They deserve something very bad, and love gives something very good anyway. When that happens, then love has taken the form of grace. It's giving the opposite of what's deserved.

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might be the righteousness of God." That's how the Bible states these things. Jesus paid our penalty, and we get his gifts. Why? Because God is love. It's not just a big theological puzzle that you try to figure out. If you can't figure it out, just get three words into your head and into your heart: God is love. The Father gave his Son, and the Son paid our penalty.

Even going beyond that, not only is the penalty paid, but God chose to come and live in us to make us his temple. I said earlier that, in some ways, this passage is the Holy of Holies because it brings us close to the very heart of God and the very presence and being of God. But there's another sense in which you're not just in the Holy of Holies; you are the Holy of Holies. You are God's temple. You are the mercy seat where God has made that propitiation, and his blood washes away your sins. You are where that great Shekinah cloud of glory comes and dwells and fills you with his life and his glory because his Spirit lives inside of you. The Bible says, "We know that we live in him and he in us because he's given us of his Spirit. If anyone confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. This is how we know that he lives in us: we know it by the Spirit he gave us."

I don't think we grasp the wonder of this, that the living God comes and makes us his home. God is so holy and so different from us that, in the older time, only one person once a year could go into the Holy of Holies--and if they did it wrong, they just might end up dead. That's how dangerous it could be to just waltz into the presence of the living God. Yet the New Testament says that you become a temple. You become God's dwelling. You become a Holy of Holies for God's own Spirit.

The Spirit who is that cloud and that fire that accompanied God's people now comes upon and lives within God's people. That was God's plan all along. Why? Well, three words: God is love. He wanted to draw his creatures, especially the ones made in his image--he wanted to draw us up into that life of the Trinity, to be loved in the same way that Jesus is loved by the Father, to experience in the same way the delight that Father and Son have in one another, to have that delight, and to know that God the Father delights in us. That is who God is, and that was God's plan all along.

This means that you and I flourish only when we trust the love that God has for us. Just about everything that is amiss in my life and in yours would vanish if we knew in our hearts and down to the depths of our toes that God is love and that God loves me. Wouldn't that take care of everything if you know that the Father loves you with that kind of love? So often we struggle

because we feel like nobody cares. If you know that you are loved by, I was going to say the most important Being in the universe, but he's not even a being in the universe in a sense. Beyond all the beings in the universe, there is that Being which is beyond the whole universe and greater than the whole universe put together--who loves me!

So much of what we go through is because we feel rotten or unworthy. A lot of what happens in life and messes up people's lives is their unsatisfied craving for atonement. Many of the civilizations of the world have this craving of atonement. You read of some of them where they would rip out a beating heart from captured people and splatter the blood all over the steps of their temples because somebody had to pay for something. You see it in our own world where there's always this group of people who are supposedly messing everything up, and if only we could get rid of them or punish them or destroy them, then we would be in paradise. That's craving atonement or scapegoating: focusing on what somebody else has done, thinking that's what is wrecking our lives, so we've got to be cruel to them, we've got to be mean to them. There's something in us that drives us to do that.

But there's something else that sometimes drives us to be cruel to ourselves and be mean to ourselves because we know something's wrong and somebody's got to pay.

Sometimes it comes out in destructive self-harm, cutting yourself, hurting yourself, doing things that wound you because somehow you feel better when you feel worse. Sometimes it comes in self-sabotage where you get into relationships where you know as soon as the relationship begins that it's messed up, but you go into it anyway because you feel you deserve that. You deserve to have somebody mean, somebody who's going to harm you because, hey, that's who you are. You shouldn't be loved. You're not lovable.

We have this terrible craving for atonement that sometimes drives us to be destructive and mean to others, sometimes to be self-destructive and harmful to ourselves and our behaviors. That's what drives a lot of addiction and alcoholism and drug use. Not just the feeling that comes from getting drunk or from getting high, because long after that feeling isn't pleasant anymore, people will keep on doing it, and they're driven to destroy themselves.

It doesn't always take that extreme form, but if you know that God loves you, if you know that the blood has paid for all of that, then you don't listen to that little voice inside that says, "I'm not worthy. I deserve the worst. I deserve a wreck." Sometimes we get that message. It certainly doesn't come from God. Sometimes, unfortunately, it comes from those whose day we celebrate on Father's Day. When you have a father who is constantly demanding and never affectionate, a father who is downright cruel or abusive, then that lodges in your very soul a sense that "I am garbage. I'm not worth it." Only when you have that love that comes from God erasing that false message of the devil can you begin to flourish again. We flourish by trusting the love that God has for us.

Sometimes that message comes even from our exposure to religion. Religion can send a lot of messages, and not all of them are "God is love," not all of them are "Your sin is paid for, and it's okay now." Sometimes people have grown up in an environment, whether it was in their own family, a certain brand of nasty, harsh religion, or they got into a particular congregation or

denomination that was sending the wrong kind of message about God. You might say, "That's kind of a hard thing to say about religion." Well, don't forget that it was chief priests and religion scholars who crucified Jesus Christ. Now, I'm a scholar of sorts and a church leader of sorts, but the fact is that religious people have sometimes done the most damage when it comes to people's knowledge of God and their wrong impression of God.

So we need to flourish by trusting the love that God shows to us. God the Father has poured out his love without reserve for his people. God the Son has paid the price. You don't have to be mean to somebody else or nasty to yourself because of what's wrong with the world. Let God take care of what's wrong with the world. You be part of the solution, no longer part of the problem. You accept the love of God. You rejoice in the love of God. You accept the blood of Jesus. It makes everything okay.

When you feel like you're still kind of helpless and meaningless, remember who lives inside you. The Bible says, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit." Don't ignore him. The Bible says if you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in you and you live in God. Do you believe that the Spirit lives inside you? A lot of us half believe it some of the time, sort of. But when you know that God lives in you and that the God of love is loving in you, that the very Holy Spirit himself is in you, then and only then is everything that's amiss with us set on the right track again. You need to know your Father's love. When the Spirit is in your heart, he cries out, "Abba, Father," and you can call God your Father.

You need to know the blood of Jesus given for you and the Holy Spirit living in you. This is one of those things that I'd need God's help on because I can't make this happen in you. You'll be tempted to say, "Well, God is love. Everybody knows that, if they've been in church a few times." No, not everybody knows that. Almost nobody knows that. Yeah, they'll agree, but do you really know that? Do you really know that God is love and that God loves you? Think on God and on his love. Pray that this love will be poured out in your heart by the Holy Spirit whom God has given you so that not only will it be words that you hear and say, "Yeah, I know. Everybody, yada yada, God is love," but that you will feel cherished by God, that you will know you're his child, and he's your Father, that you will know that all that stuff that gets you down, that makes you feel unworthy, has been cleansed and washed away by the atoning blood of Christ, that you know that you are never alone, that he will never leave you nor forsake you, that he's not just with you but he's in you. The great project of your life is to notice. Notice that he's in you and to go along with what the Holy Spirit is doing in you.

We know a little bit of God and his love. Those things are dawning on us. It takes a lifetime and probably seeing him face to face till we finally get through our heads what this magnificent passage reveals to us, but we can at least make a beginning. God is love as Trinity. God shows his love among us by what the Father, the Son, and the Spirit do. In addition, God fuels our love.

### **God fuels love**

- All love comes from God's love.
- Love displays union with God.
- Love grows in us to maturity.

- Mature love builds confidence.
- If we love God, we love others.

The first thing to notice is simply that all love comes from God's love. "Dear friends, let us love one another because love comes from God. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. We love because he first loved us." Those are all ways of saying that all love comes from God's love. When you know God loves you, then his love not only goes to you but through you, and he fuels the love that you have for other people.

This love, John says, displays union with God. When we love, God abides in us. "God is love. Whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." Jesus himself said, "By this, all will know you're my disciples if you love one another." So when you have this union where God is living in you by his Holy Spirit, and you're united to God, then love comes from you.

This is the final apologetic. This is how other people know we follow Jesus. The proof is not just the accuracy of our theological statements. Those are valuable and important, and John would be the last to say it doesn't matter what you believe. It matters immensely. But the test and the missionary power come in love because if you're stating correct facts about God and there is no love, you will get nowhere in trying to share the gospel with others. The truth of the gospel almost always crosses the bridge of love. If there's no bridge of love and you're trying to drive a truckload of theology to someone else, it's just going to fall down into the canyon because there is this canyon between you and the person you're trying to communicate with. But where there is love, then there is a bridge for that truckload of truth to pass across. "By this, all will know you're my disciples if you love one another."

Francis Schaeffer said that love is the final apologetic. He spent his life writing books and doing apologetics, making the case for Christianity, but he said love is the final apologetic because there you're putting God's reality on display. You're not just talking about him, but his life and reality is working through you. So in your own life, you're going to be more attractive to people and attract them to the gospel if you're a loving person. A church that is loveless is going to repel people. I've already mentioned that some people's church experience is precisely why they can't believe in God or see him as a God of love because they were never part of a community of love. Let's love one another, for love comes from God, and it displays our union with God.

As I mentioned before, there's a sense in which almost none of us knows this fully. Of course, God's own love is always perfect and complete and full grown, but its expression in us might be incomplete or not fully realized. The word for mature or complete or perfect is the same word in Greek, so sometimes it's hard to know exactly whether it's talking about perfect as in "morally perfect" or "fully mature." But John says that we have this maturity where love grows in us. "This is how God's love is made complete [or made perfect} among us." That's a very strong statement to say that God's love gets perfected. In one sense, God's love is always perfect, but his love in us is sometimes like a little thing just beginning to sprout. At one point, the Bible talks about Christ being formed in us. There's a sense in which baby Christ comes into us. In our experience and expression of him, he's just in childhood, so to speak. God's love, even as we experience it, is only an immature experience of it. But as it flowers, as it grows and develops and matures, then it reaches a greater and greater maturity. As we grow in that love and as we

become more mature, we love God more, we love our neighbors more, we love our family members more.

Jesus says, "Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." When does he say that? Right after he says, "Love your enemies." Be good to those who are mean to you so that you'll be like your Father in heaven. Be perfect as your Father is perfect. He sends good things on the bad people and on the good people. He just keeps sending good things. Now be perfect. That's what perfect love is, when you can love those who don't like you, when you can love your enemies.

Another point that I want to make here is that maturity is shown in the way you love other people. Some people feel like you're really getting to be a mature Christian if you have an advanced knowledge of the Bible. The Bible is very important in maturing. Others will say, "Wow, if you reach the mystical union with God and have a direct revelation and overwhelming revelation and encounter with God, this is the summit of spiritual maturity." But this Bible passage says the summit of spiritual maturity is loving other people. "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, I'm a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge and have a faith that can move mountains but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames and have not love, I am nothing" (1 Corinthians 13). All of the greatest experiences that you can imagine with God or encounters with God, all the mightiest spiritual gifts that you might have, all the deepest knowledge you have, it is nothing without love. You are mature when you have learned to love.

That maturity begins with loving those closest to you, with loving those whom you can see, as we're going to look at in a moment. The sign of maturity is not any experience or spiritual gift. You might be told, "You can really move on to a higher spiritual level if you have a certain spiritual gift." Some have said that it's the gift of tongues. The gift of tongues may be fine and helpful for some people, but what does the Bible say? It says, "If I speak in the tongues of men and angels and have not love, nada!" There are going to be people who have spiritual gifts who aren't even going to get to heaven, let alone be the most mature of all believers. So we need to realize that maturity, the way to measure your growth in God, is your love.

It's not some flashy thing. What is it? After Paul gives that great statement about love, he says, "Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud. It is not rude. It is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails." This love just keeps on going, keeps on being patient, keeps on putting up with others.

We might be looking for the great summit of perfection, but the apostle tells us, "If you know how to put up with people, you are more mature in God than if you could speak the greatest sermon or gave the biggest checks to charity. If you know how to put up with people and be patient and kind, now you're really moving up the ladder of spiritual maturity."

When you have that love that is powerful, that love that lasts, then that builds your confidence. The Bible says we're going to have "confidence on the day of judgment because in this world, we

are like him." That's how love is made complete or mature among us so that we'll have confidence because we're like him. How does love then set our hearts at rest or build confidence? Well, for one thing, I know and trust God's love for me. All of our confidence for the day of judgment is rooted in trust in God and in the blood of Jesus and his great love for us. So I say to myself, "Well, if God did all of that for me, then he's not going to cast me away on the day of judgment because his blood covers me and his love surrounds me."

Another way it helps us with our fear is that when you start to love somebody, you're not so scared of them anymore. Some people, even if they're not bad people or mean people, are intimidating people. There are people who are super smart or super good at something, or you're just kind of in awe of who they are. They're intimidating. Then you get to know them, and some of them aren't as intimidating because they aren't all they're cracked up to be. But some of them may be all they were cracked up to be, and yet you know them better, and you know that they're affectionate, that they're kind. You take a liking to them, and the more you like and enjoy and love somebody, the less scary they are. They're still the same person, but they're not so scary anymore because now you know their love, and you have love for them.

You have confidence in the day of judgment, says John, because there's a family resemblance. When you find yourself more and more loving and growing in love, even for your enemies, then you say, "Wow, I know where that came from, and it didn't come from me because, by nature, I'm not that fond of my enemies. By nature, I'm likely to lash back at somebody." But when I'm loving my family, my neighbors, even my enemies, then I'm thinking, "I'm starting to resemble my Father at least a little bit." So I can face him on the day of judgment, not because, first of all, I'm such a good guy, but when you see that going on in you, then you know that God's Spirit is doing that. You know that your sins are washed away, and you know that he's making you like him. When you see yourself becoming like him, that gives you more and more confidence.

Not everybody who's a Christian and who will be saved has confidence. "Perfect love drives out fear" Mature love drives out fear "because fear has to do with punishment." Love is not our only motivation, and it's not the only one God gives us. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and sometimes that's just plain being scared of him. You really ought to be scared of him if you're against him, if you're fighting him, because I told you who wins. Love wins. If you're going to fight him, then you're going to lose. So it's sensible to be afraid of God if you're going to set yourself against him. But as you get to know him better and as you know his love for you, you still can be kind of scared sometimes because you're not completely like him and your faith gets shaky. Your assurance is going to often be about as strong as your love for other people. You might not like hearing that. You might wish you could have blessed assurance, 100% assurance, feeling fabulously sure of your salvation even if you're getting along terribly with people and don't have much love for them. Sorry about that. The Bible says that love is what drives out the fear because it's showing you a resemblance to God.

Think of it like a three-legged race. In a three-legged race, you have two people, and you tie the legs that are next to each other together, and then the two of you try to walk, each with a leg attached to the other. If one of you goes too fast and tries to run ahead, you usually fall down, and you don't win the race. Faith and love are those two partners in a three-legged race. If you're hoping that your faith and assurance are going to get way ahead of your love, sorry about that. It

won't work; faith and love are attached. Assurance grows when faith and love are running together. We have confidence, we have faith, because we're like him in our love.

Fear can have its place. It can drive the unsaved to realize they need God. It can push the Christian who's out of whack and out of tune with God back towards God. But ultimately, the best is simply to be drawn by the love of God and then express that love maturely so that, as your love grows, your confidence for the day of judgment grows because you're becoming more and more like your Father in heaven. Even if you're going to be saved on the day of judgment, it's going to be intimidating to stand before the judgment seat of God with some of the things we've done or failed to do. But the more that his love has taken shape in us, the more we can stand fearless on the day of judgment.

Finally, if we love God, we love others. That's how John closes the passage. He says, "We love because he first loved us." If you say, "Oh, I love God because that is the greatest commandment: love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength." You say, "I got that one. I really love God a lot," but if you can't stand anybody around you, you're just lying about your love for God. "If anyone says, 'I love God' but hates his brother, he is a liar, because anyone who doesn't love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen."

You say, "Well, of course, I can. You ought to see that person I don't like. I can see him all right. I can see his faults, and let me list them for you. You can see one thing after another after another that's not lovable." It might be your spouse. You're having a hard time loving your husband. You're having a hard time loving your wife. You say, "But I love God. You know, what's not to love?" Well, has it ever occurred to you that there's a bigger difference between you and God than there is between you and your spouse? A lot of things we don't love are because of differences. You want to talk different? You're different from God. There is a great, great gap between what kind of being he is and what kind of being I am. If I can't love the people that are two feet from my nose, then I shouldn't fool myself that I have this fabulous love for the invisible, unseen God.

The Bible emphasizes again and again that you can't see God. John 1:18 says, "No one has ever seen God, but God the one and only, God the only begotten, who is at the Father's side, has made him known." So in Jesus, you get to know who the unseen God is and what he's like. At the beginning of this passage, it says, "No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete [or made perfect] among us." Then he says again, "Now anyone who doesn't love his brother whom he has seen can't love God whom he hasn't seen."

God commanded his people, "You shall not make any images that you worship," but he gave one image through which to honor him. The image of God is on every person you meet. If you love God, then one way to love God's icon is not to make icons of God but to love God's icon or image in the people that you meet. Jesus himself says, "Whatever you did to the least of these, you did to me." God takes it personally because his image is in his people. So you really can't love the unseen God if you're going to hate his image and those who bear that image.

Start with your family. If you think, "I'm a person who really loves wonderfully well," the best way to test that is if you get dumped, without your choice, into a group of people and see how you do. You didn't pick them; you just got dumped there among them. You went down the chimney, landed in the building, and now you're with those people. How are you going to handle that? Well, that's basically what happened when you came out of your mother's birth canal. You got dumped into a house full of people you didn't choose, and there you are. Can you love the people in the house where you came down the chimney, that batch of people that God stuck you with? You say you love God. Well, God arranged your life. He put certain people in your life, some of them family, some of them enemies, some of them enemies in your family. How we relate to them is the display of how much of God's life is already at work in us. God is love, and because he's love, he's the one who fuels our love.

### **God is Love**

- God is Trinity.
- God shows love.
- God fuels love.

This is the message in a nutshell. God is Trinity. God has shown that love through Jesus Christ and by pouring out his Holy Spirit. God fuels the love that we have for others.

The greatest commandment is, love God above all. The second greatest is, love your neighbor as yourself. If you're tempted to ask, "Who is my neighbor?" then listen to the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus tells that story and then he asks, "Now who acted like a neighbor to the man who needed help?" Don't ask, "Who is my neighbor?" Instead, ask, "How can I be a neighbor?"

To love God, to love others as God has loved us—this is what it is to live. This is what it is to be a Christian. There's really nothing more to it than this: to know that God is love, to know that he loves you, to love him, and to love others. As Saint Augustine once said, "Love and do as you will," because if you are dominated and controlled by the love of God, then whatever you do is going to be right.

### **Prayer**

Dear Father, we thank you for your everlasting love. We pray, Lord, that more and more you will work your way into the corners of our hearts that still refuse that love, that still don't know you as love. We pray, Father, that we may know you as you are, that you will cleanse from us all that hinders us, that you'll take away the thoughts that are unworthy of you, that have told us lies about you. We pray that you'll shield us from the great enemy of our souls who over and over lies about you. Lord, whatever our scars and wounds might be, whatever our difficulties and challenges have been, we pray that in the love of God we may overcome them. We pray that in the mighty love of God we may flourish in you. We pray that in that mighty love of God we may love others as you have loved us and that all will know that we are your disciples because we love one another. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

**God is Love**  
**Slide Contents**  
**By David Feddes**

**Beloved children**

“Beloved” 6x (ἀγαπητοί)

“Children” 9x (παιδιά, τέκνια)

- John speaks lovingly to dear friends, his spiritual children.
- John speaks to children of the Father who are loved by God.

**God is love**

- God is Trinity.
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**God is Trinity**

- God is Father, Son, and Spirit.
- Three are one in love and being.
- Never is God unloved or unloving.
- Never can hate defeat Love.
- Infinite Love is ultimate reality.

**God shows love**

- Father gives us his all.
- Jesus paid our penalty.
- Spirit lives inside us.
- We flourish by trusting the love God shows us.

**God fuels love**

- All love comes from God’s love.
- Love displays union with God.
- Love grows in us to maturity.
- Mature love builds confidence.
- If we love God, we love others.

## **God is love**

- God is Trinity.
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