

## 1 John 4:7-11—Know God to Know Love

What is love? The hip-hop singer Haddaway asked that with his hit-single in the early 90s. The group Foreigner pleaded to understand it better with their song, “I want to know what love is!” Nat King Cole tried to explain it when he sang, “L is for the way you look at me, o is...” using the letters of “love” to expound on what love is. So many songs have tried to explain it, understand it, dive into, and plead for love. And still it seems an elusive thing to grasp, this love. We recognize there’s different types of it. We can use a dictionary to define it. Science has figured out the chemical equation and balance in your brain that makes it up. And still, we want to try and understand it better because you know you want it, this love. You know you need it. You want to show it. So how do we define this feeling of butterflies in the stomach, this warming emotion that fills your heart, this thing that drives people to action, this love? John writes in chapter 4:7-11.

*Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. <sup>11</sup> Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*

There it is. That’s love. Amen. But wait...there’s more. It’s not just something you receive; it’s what we are called to show. So we must look at it a little more closely.

Here is someone whose love moves him to send his own only Son—who he also loves most dearly—to save those he loves. This love isn’t just a feeling here one moment and gone the next. This isn’t just an emotion that changes depending on your mood. This love is action. It’s visible. It’s something you can grasp, so-to-speak. It’s sacrificing. At God’s own expense, he gives up Jesus. It’s self-less; he receives nothing from this transaction. It puts someone else’s comfort, needs, wants before your own. God’s love doesn’t seek his own good. It’s not promoting himself or his position. But seeks the good for someone else. It looks to promote someone else’s position. This love isn’t seeking anything in return. It’s not a payment for some work that is done. It’s a gift with no strings attached, hidden contract fees, or fine-print. This is God’s love. This is the love above all other types of love that we are to show each other.

So how are you doing with it? How much love are you showing/thinking when you are stuck behind the driver who is in no hurry and you are? Do you love the telemarketer who once again has called your number? Or what about the cable or

credit card company when you need assistance? By no means is it easy. That's especially true when someone has a different view on this world than you. It's difficult when they are coming from the other side and you simply can't understand how they could think that way. Then there's the person who hurt you, or almost worse, hurt someone who was close to you. It's hard to love them especially when you are still stoking that fire of anger. You can't hold them in love while still holding on to that grudge. It's even more difficult when they don't realize they did something to hurt you.

What about those who are closer to us? We hope that we do better. Sometimes we do. At the same time, they are the ones who often are hurt the worst when we do not love as God loves. Instead, they get the cheap love. Because of who they are, you have to love them. There's an obligation to love them. But at the same time, we expect a similar love and, at times, take advantage of it. Because of your relationship to them we hope they will still love us even when you are busy doing other things and not loving them.

And if it's not that, too easily do we slip into a transactional love. You know, since I've done this, you more-or-less expect them to love you in a similar way. You don't want to demand it, but there's this unspoken agreement they need to love you in return.

Or when I have misplaced my love, or acted unlovingly, then I feel a need to make-up for it in some way. So I wasn't paying close enough attention or listening, now I'm going to take the garbage out without asking. I'm going to help out with the dishes. I'll do something to hopefully refill that missing love.

But then if I'm not receiving the love that I need, then it is hard to love in return. We're reluctant to show that love first. We're only doing it to protect ourselves. You've been taken advantage of and hurt too many times. You know you need love too.

So if that's how we love in so many of our relationships, is it really any surprise that we find ourselves treating God's love and how we love him in a similar way. At least that's the way it seems when we ignore or do not love as he calls us to love him. He tells us quite simply how to show him our love: obey his commands. And we do, as long as it doesn't ask too much from you or make life too inconvenient. We will as long as it lines up with your own plans for life.

We treat his love like anyone else's when we love so many of God's blessings more than the one who gave us those blessings. Our love for others often gets in the way of our love for God.

We treat God's love like another transaction. We are careful to not say anything about deserving God's love. At the same time, you have been making improvements with your life. You were doing a little better at listening and loving others. Can't God show me a little more? You've already dealt with pain, struggle, suffering, problems, isn't it time for me to have a little more love? Then we have cheapened God's love to little more than comforts and slightly fewer annoyances in life.

Then when we don't have those things, we are quick to wonder about how much God truly loves us. We may listen to the world that points to all of the unloving, hate-filled, destructive actions as evidence that God is not a God of love. Or it's thinking, you need to do something more to have his love. You're honest with yourself, you know you haven't loved as God says, but if I just do more, try harder, even a little more, then maybe I can better feel his love. But then we just cheapen his love even further to being something we can earn for ourselves while making God into a tiny God whose love is no better than anyone else's love.

Dear friends, **"This is love,"** John writes: **"Not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins"** (v.10). We were the definition of unlovable. We were objects of God's wrath. We were the very thing that he hates most: sin. There's nothing in us to warrant or convince God to love us. And still he does. There was nothing we could do to make ourselves more lovable or any less unlovable. There's nothing you can do to begin to pay him back. And still he loves you without any demand of repayment. He doesn't want you to try. This love is a gift. While we were still lovers of sin, the Father gives His Son to be atoning sacrifice for sin.

That's why God loves you. The Word, true God from the beginning, takes on flesh and blood and is born of virgin mother. He is Jesus—100% true God and 100% true man—who God sends for all those times we have missed the mark on love. On the altar of the cross God makes the sacrifice. The blood is poured out. The life is laid down. The Lamb of God, Jesus, takes away the sins of the world. God's wrath is appeased. If Jesus was not true God from the beginning, his death would be just another death of how many billions of people. It would count for nothing. If Jesus were not true man, then his suffering would not be real. His death would be just for show. It would not pay the price for our lack of love. We would not know God and we would still be in our sin. But Jesus is true God. He is true man. That means your sins were truly paid for on that cross. God will not punish you for your sins, he's already punished Jesus. He will not take his love from you, he took it away from Jesus when we hear him cry out, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus died for you, for me, for us, so that you might be at one with God.

But don't you dare feel sorry for Jesus. You didn't force him to die. I didn't either. Neither did the Father. Jesus saw two options. On the one hand was your suffering for eternity in hell and God's love taken from you. On the other was his own suffering, his own pain, God's love being taken from him, his death. As far as Jesus was concerned, this was a no brainer. He says to you, "There's no greater love that I could show you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. I chose you. I wanted you to know God and to know his love. You can pick your friends, right? Well, I have chosen you. You could not choose me. You could not accept God's love into your life. I chose you. God's wrath is gone against you. He's on your side. He loves you because I chose you."

Whether you believe it or not does not change the fact that God loves you. Jesus died for you. Jesus rose for you. That empty tomb on Easter gives all the hope and proof we need to know God's love isn't just words. It's real. It's for you. That's what you continue to hear when Jesus says, "I forgive you all your sins." "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." "Take and eat. Take and drink. This is my body...this is blood...given and poured out **for you** for the forgiveness of **your** sins." And there's nothing in heaven above, on earth here, or even hell itself that can take God's love away from you.

With Spirit-worked faith, believe it. With Spirit-worked faith, let's love one another. Test the spirits to make sure the God's word you hear and God's love that is promoted is really God's word and love and not someone's personal opinion. Uphold the teachings of God's word so that Jesus' love is not lost in this unloving world. Continue to grow in it with personal Bible Study and bible study with your friends in Jesus here at church so that you may continue to grow in understanding and appreciation for how wide, how deep, and how long Jesus loves us. Don't worry; you won't get to the bottom of it. It won't get stale. And as you grown in it, Jesus' love compels us to produce good fruit of loving our neighbor—your spouse, your child, the random stranger—as Jesus has loved us. They need Jesus' love as much as you do. Know God's love for you and let's love one another. Amen.