

“What Love is This”?

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 Date: December 24, 2006 **Christmas Eve Morning Services**
Christmas Eve Service (4pm)
 Title: “The Love of God as a First Cause”
 Text: 1 John 4:10, 15-21
 Theme: We love, because He first loved us.

ILLUSTRATION:

On Friday December 22 at 10AM while attending my daughter’s graduation from College I was watching The View. It is a talk show led by four women, including Rosie O’Donnell and Barbara Walters. The question being addressed was, “HEAVEN: Where is it and how do we get there?” Rosie quoted a friend whose initials were G.O.D. Her friend said, “Heaven or hell is here on Earth decided by your own free will.” Throughout the program it was an attempt by the blind to describe a sunrise, the deaf to explore a symphony, the dumb to explain Newton’s law of relativity, the lost to act as a guiding compass, the illiterate to read bedtime stories, and atheists to tell of God.

Such spiritual stupidity calls the cross a fluke and a fairy tale. It makes Christmas anything but about Christ and His redemptive activity.

Our text this morning answers the question, “Why Christmas?” Christmas exists because God the Father loved us and in response to His love for us He sent His Son to die voluntarily a vicarious death in our behalf in order that God’s wrath against us would be satisfied. This is the true meaning of Christmas.

The larger paragraph reads from verses 15 through 21. However, in our study we will only be looking at verses 10 and 17 through 21. Verses 15 and 16 were considered under the larger idea of love as an attribute of God. Because God is love all of His actions are marked by love.

In the absence of who God is, we would love no one and nothing other than ourselves. It is the love of God that sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. The whole redemptive activity of God is sourced in who God is, not in who man is or has done.

We have a tendency to believe that we are the end and the means. We are delusional as to what position we hold in the created order. Although we are the pinnacle of all things created, we are still created. There is only one Creator and we are not Him. We struggle when we think that God’s love for us is unconditional and thus unmerited. We want to believe that somehow God’s love for us is inescapably merited. Because of who we are, He had no other

choice. This is, fortunately, not true. I say “fortunately” because if the love of God was something to be merited then it would always be unattainable. We are never capable of measuring up to the standard established by God. God’s love for us is a first cause. In the absence of His love for us, life would be at a complete standstill.

ILLUSTRATION:

Many of us have seen the structure with a series of metal balls hanging from string that when clicked together their kinetic energy keeps them going. In order for those balls to move, someone or something has to move them. There must be a first cause. God is the hand that moves us to set in motion a series of loving expressions.

John is often cited as the one who celebrates the love of God. Inside of 1 John, he accents multiple dimensions of God’s love. One of the primary and foundational ideas within 1 John is that God loves us first. The love of God is a first cause. God is the one who causes all things, but He Himself is uncaused.

John gives us three consequences of this first cause activity.

- I. Because God loves us, He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins (v. 10).

“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

It is the love of God that moves Him to placate His own wrath against us. There is nothing outside of God that moves Him to love us. His love forms for us a first cause. Such thinking as this is unexplainable. It exceeds our ability to comprehend. God offered up His own Son as a vicarious sacrifice for those who stood in a position of rebellion against Him. The Son of God voluntarily took upon Himself a human nature and then surrendered Himself up as the vicarious sacrifice. He submitted Himself to an ultimate humiliation at the hands of those He created.

As sinners who rejected God, we became objects of His wrath; a wrath that would be fully justifiable in its demonstration against sinners. The complete expression of this wrath would be an eternal separation from God and all that results as a benefit of His presence, played out in a lake of fire where a perpetual state of agony and torment exists.

The absolute marvel of this is not that we have loved God and continue to love God, but that there was a point in time when God loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. We are the objects of His attention, His energy.

The spectacle of this is established through contrast. Us loving God is easy; Him loving us is the miracle.

The only means for this wrath to be negated through satisfaction is in God becoming man and dying in our place as race representative. As far fetched as this sounds, it happened. The motivating factor prompting God to act as He did is His gracious justifying love.

This brings us to our second point inside of our paragraph.

- II. Because God loves us, we can have confidence in the Day of Judgment (vv. 10, 17, 18).

¹⁰ “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be **the propitiation for our sins**. ¹⁷ By this, **love is perfected with us**, so that we may have confidence in the Day of Judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love; but **perfect love casts out fear**, because fear involves punishment, and **the one who fears is not perfected in love**” (1 John 4:10, 17, 18).

“but whoever keeps His word, **in him the love of God has truly been perfected**. By this we know that we are in Him” (1 John 2:5).

“No one has beheld God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and **His love is perfected in us**” (1 John 4:12).

Verse 19 says that **we love in the present only because God loved us in the past**. It is His past love for us that makes us loving and loveable in time.

The word “perfect” in 4:12 and 17 are both perfect passives. The passive suggests we are the containers in which His perfect love is poured/held. The perfect speaks of an historical event with continuing consequences. The abiding presence of God causes us to be the recipients of His perfected love. **His love in us brings us to completion. His love accomplishes His goal.** The means of God getting us to His goal is His love. His love is perfected with us because He is in us. And because He is with us and He does not condemn us (Rom. 8:34) we are to fear no one.

He did not simply start the process and then leave us to finish it. He will bring us to a glorious finish.

“The love of God to us does not admit of degrees, nor does it, or the reality and sincerity of it, depend upon our love to the saints.” (John Gill on 1 John 4:17)

The love of God is the cause that creates a platform for confidence in the Day of Judgment (1 John 4:17, 18). Because the perfect love of God abides within us

we can have confidence in the future day of judgment when and where everyone and everything will give an account of their lives.

This confidence communicates joyfulness. It is celebratory in its essence. It speaks of a “freedom of speech.” There is a liberty granted that loosens our tongues so that we might praise Him unashamedly.

“The great ground of boldness is that we are as Christ; purified like him, made sinless like him, filled with love like him and appear at judgment in his likeness. This transformation begins when we are converted, hence, in this world.” (The People's New Testament, B.W. Johnson, 1891)

The perfect love of God is the imputed righteousness of Christ placed into the account of the redeemed. Because we have the imputed righteousness of Christ placed upon us, the Father sees us as righteous as His Son, and thus, we have no fear of punishment. If we fear, it is because we do not understand our present union with Christ and what this means in relation to the Father and future judgment.

It is the love of God that creates for us a friendly context in which He receives us before Himself. His love moves Him to impute to our account the righteousness of Christ. It is this imputation of Christ’s righteousness that removes from us fear and replaces it with confidence.

It is the love of God that allows me no longer to fear His wrath and thus punishment. It is the perfect love of God in me that removes from me a fear of future (or even immediate) punishment.

We have lived so long in bondage that it is a work of grace to live in freedom. Love and fear are mutually exclusive concepts. My fear of God does not negate my love for God. My fear of God is one of a creature before their Creator, a son before their Father, and a redeemed slave before their Liberator. In none of these relationships is there a fear of punishment, only of adoration.

This brings us to our third, and final, point inside of our paragraph.

III. Because God loves us, we love (vv. 19-21).

¹⁹ “We love, because He first loved us. ²⁰ If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also” (1 John 4:19-21).

The love of God forms the only reasons as to why I love at all (1 John 4:19-21). It is the love of God as a first cause that enables me to love anyone and

anything. In the absence of God's love, I would not be capable of loving anyone or anything. For us to profess Christ openly yet perpetuate grudges or bitterness of heart secretly is irreconcilable. Such a person is a liar (v. 20). Bringing resolution to internal bitterness is not as easy as flipping a switch, but if we consciously cultivate and nurture the seeds of bitterness within us, we will reap a harvest of woe.

Augustine in his homily #8 makes the following observation concerning the love of God.

“But our soul, my brethren, is unlovely by reason of iniquity: by loving God it becomes lovely. What a love must that be that makes the lover beautiful!”

Any expression of love I have for others or seen in others is a constant confirmation of God's love. If God did not initiate loving, then no one anywhere at anytime would love. We would have been consumed by our own self-serving desires and constant exploitation of others.

If this is true, then how should we now live?

APPLICATION: (Where do we go from here? What is the NEXT STEP?)

First, knowing that the reason behind God sending His Son to be a propitiating sacrifice lays solely in God, we should be *deeply humbled and eternally grateful*. Everything we have, we received as a gift from God. There is nothing we possess that we earned independent of His gracious love.

“His love is the incentive, the motive, and moral cause of ours. We cannot but love so good a God, who was first in the act and work of love, who loved us when we were both unloving and unlovely, who loved us at so great a rate, who has been seeking and soliciting our love at the expense of his Son's blood; and has condescended to beseech us to be reconciled unto him. Let heaven and earth stand amazed at such love!” (Matthew Henry on 1 John 4:19, @1700)

Second, we should stop living in the fear of future judgment and *start living in the freedom of a perfect love*. When we fear future punishment, we are negating the power of His redemptive work in the canceling of sin.

Finally, *every act and expression of love is a picture of who God is and what He has done*. We need to see the love of God in the mundane and routine and in the details and fragmented pieces of life. We need to start seeing and hearing and feeling this love, and we need to ask God to be this in us and through us to those around us.

The invisible God of love is seen in the visible people of God. If you and I are not marked by biblical love, then how can we expect the world to see who God is and what He has done?

ILLUSTRATION:

The "Christmas truce" is a term used to describe the brief unofficial cessation of hostilities that occurred between German and British troops stationed on the Western Front of World War I during Christmas 1914.

Amid the horrors of World War I, there occurred a unique truce when, for a few hours, enemies behaved like brothers. Christmas Eve, 1914, and all was quiet on France's western front, from the English Channel to the Swiss Alps. Trenches came within 50 miles of Paris. The war was only five months old and already over 800,000 men had been wounded or lost their lives. Every soldier wondered whether Christmas Day would bring another round of fighting and killing, but something happened: British soldiers raised Merry Christmas signs, and soon carols were heard from German and British trenches alike.

Christmas dawned with unarmed soldiers leaving their trenches as officers from both sides tried unsuccessfully to stop their troops from meeting the enemy in the middle of no-man's-land for songs and conversation. Exchanging small gifts—mostly sweets and cigars—they passed Christmas Day peacefully along miles of the front. At one spot, the British played soccer with the Germans.

In some places, the spontaneous truce continued the next day, neither side willing to fire the first shot. Finally, the war resumed when fresh troops arrived, and the high command of both armies ordered that further "informal understandings" with the enemy would be punishable as treason. In all of the following years of the war, artillery bombardments were ordered on Christmas Eve to ensure that there were no further lulls in the combat.

My friend, with God every day is Christmas. Peace has flowed from heaven and will never cease. God will never take up arms against you again. You are no longer an enemy (see 5:10). You have been reconciled to God. There is peace in your relationship. http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=854

A cross, left near Ypres in Belgium in 1999, to commemorate the site of the Christmas Truce in 1914. The text reads . . .

1914

The Khaki Chum's Christmas Truce

1999

85 Years

Lest We Forget.