

“Amazing Love”

December 4, 2011

Text: 1 John 4:7-10

For the next minute or so, try to think as God would think.

Suppose You wanted to enable man to understand the

infinite/awesome intensity of Your love—its selflessness & willingness to sacrifice for those upon whom You place Your love.

Man would be amazed if he could really understand such love, but in/of himself he has little such understanding of Your divine love due to the limitations placed on him by his sinful condition.

He can still love in a reduced/confined sense, because he was created in God’s own image to love, & to be loved.

But when he thinks/sings his songs about love, it’s just a pale shadow of God’s love—Your love (since you’re thinking like God thinks).

How could You best explain to man the powerful fervency of Your love for him?

You could go to earth and receive unto Yourself Your own wrath (stirred up by man’s sin, against You) in order to protect him from becoming the target of that wrath.

That would very convincingly display Your love for man.

Even better, You could send to earth Your Son whom You love with Your own infinite love, having Him take on Himself man's innate weakness, and then endure the penalty dictated by Your own just nature, against man's sin.

You could do all that, motivated only by Your love, in order to help man gain insight into its extraordinary greatness.

Unfortunately, because men know so little about real love, most would neither believe/imagine that You could/would do anything so costly to Yourself, simply out of Your love for them.

Some would cynically assume You did it because You needed someone to love You, because they don't understand that each Member of the Trinity already loves every other Member w/ infinite love, unsullied by sin.

So You don't need anyone else's love at all.

You're doing this for Your creatures' benefit, not
Your own.

Fortunately, a few, by the power of the H.S. would come to believe You did it purely out of the love You've chosen to set on them.

They would come to know You by faith, and develop a loving relationship with You, becoming more/more loving themselves, as a result of that relationship.

As we'll see in today's text, this is exactly how God Himself dealt with the problem of demonstrating for man the infinite-greatness, the awesome intensity/sincerity of His love.

The Apostle John will *exhort* us to love with God's love, describing the sacrificial nature of that love as it was *manifested* in His sending X to earth.

Then finally, John will describe the *magnificence* of God's love.

So we'll see=>

- * the *exhortation* to love with God's own love

- * the *manifestation* and *magnificence* of God's love.

* **The Exhortation to Love** (w/ God's own *agape* love)

Repeatedly throughout this paragraph (vss 7-14), John will call/encourage his readers to love one another=>

Verse 11=> "*We... ought to love one another.*"

Verse 12=> "*If we love one another, God abides in us.*"

In verse 7 of our own text, we come to the 1st of these exhortations to love.

[1 John 4:7]=> "*Beloved, let us love one another...*"

John addresses his readers as "*Beloved,*" assuring them that he loves them, then calling them to manifest that same *agape*

love themselves, love that is characterized by selfless devotion.

This is the love Rom 5:5 says God has poured out w/i our hearts.

It's the love to which Paul calls Xns in Phil 2, commanding us to “[*Maintain*] the same **love**, united in spirit” and then specifying exactly how to do that=> “*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself*” (Phil 2:2-3).

Now, having exhorted his readers to love, John begins to give them some compelling reasons for doing so.

Reason #1—the Source/Origin of *agape* Love

[Verse 7b]=> “*for love is from God;*”

All true love originates in God, who pours out His love into us when we become born again through faith in Jesus X.

This is the true/pure love of God, that's sadly lacking in the world, and that the world so desperately needs.

Because we have received it, we ought to bless others with it, and God tells us to begin by loving one another as Xns.

Love is “*from God*”—He is it's source, & it flows from Him.

Even though God's image in man has been marred by sin, man still has some capacity for love.

E.g. motherhood is a role created by God which calls for selfless love whether/not a woman is born-again.

If we are truly children of God, we must love as He loves.

Jesus (Mt 5:44-45)=> “*But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you / in order that*

you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.”

Whenever we love selflessly we manifest God’s image in us, and we make a connection w/ the nobility of God’s own loving goodness, however faintly it may be seen in us.

But even the greatest of human loves is but a shadow of God’s love, just as man’s righteousness is like dirty rags compared to God’s righteousness.

Reason #2—the Believer’s Enablement to Love

[Verse 7c]=> *“and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.”*

Unlike non-believers, believers love because God has enabled us to love w/ His love, & so we ought to love one another.

John uses the pres. part. form of “*loves*” to mean

“Everyone who continually loves is born of God.”

And because God has enabled us to love, we should love one another, just as our Heavenly Father loves.

Having been “*born of God,*” we draw both our spiritual life and our new nature from Him, as His children and partakers of His divine nature (II Pet 1:4).

So selfless love is the mark of a true child of God.

Our Heavenly Father loves, therefore we love.

John says “*everyone who loves*” instead of “he who loves” because there are no exceptions to this general principle.

In the first part of this verse we find the phrase “*love is from [ek—out of] God*” (love comes from God’s own nature).

In the last part, those who love are “*born [ek, out of] God.*” So both the nature of the lover a/w/a/ his love, come from the same Source—a loving God.

In addition, because the believer is “*born of God,*” he “*knows God.*”

This is on-going experiential knowledge of God which creates love-producing fellowship with Him.

1 Jn 1:3 said we have fellowship with both God the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.

That fellowship of love we have with God makes us more loving ourselves—like God.

And that, in turn, should result in loving relationships among Xns.

Human love can only be raised to the heights of God’s selfless *agape* love when a person comes to know God thru a personal relationship w/ His Son, Jesus X.

Without such faith/knowledge, man is cut off from God, the Source of all real love, because his sinful heart rejects X, the only way to God.

Unless the Lord intervenes, the human heart won’t love God at all, & its love for other people will be corrupted by selfishness.

Now as John often does, he cuts off any escape from these principles, by presenting the reverse side of the same argument.

[Verse 8]=> *“The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”*

I.e., not only can we say that all Xns are lovers, we can also so that all non-lovers are non-Xns.

Where there is no love, there is no regenerated heart.

In that case, the person doesn't know God, & the aorist tense used here means he has never come to know God.

Lack of love proves a lack of genuine Xnity.

An unloving person may argue, “I'm sure that I know God because I remember when I was saved &/or baptized.”

But his lack of love is evidence that he no more knows God than the loveless scribes/Pharisees did, who thought all their Scripture-knowledge about God proved they knew Him.

If they truly had, it would have changed their hearts;

They would have loved other people instead of looking down on them with disdain.

At the end of verse 8, John makes a monumental statement about God's nature=> *“God is love.”*

It's not merely that God is loving—He is Himself love.

This doesn't mean that God is merely an abstract concept of love.

But it does mean that everything He does is absolutely loving, because it couldn't be otherwise, given His loving nature.

God's love explains much of what we know about Him=>

* E.g., even when God judges, He judges in love, delaying His judgment to give man time to repent, just as Peter writes=>

*The Lord is not slow about His promise [to judge], as some count slowness, but is **patient** toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to **repentance***" (2 Pet 3:9).

* In His providential love, God cares for even His smallest, least-important creatures.

Mt 6:26=> *"Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?"*

* Knowing that men have a desperate need to be saved, He lovingly calls them all to Himself, even though most will never come.

In love, Jesus calls them=> *"Come to Me, all who are weary & heavy-laden, and I will give you rest"* (Mt 11:28).

* Most importantly, love of sinners explains God's plan of redemption, providing a remedy for sin thru Jesus Christ=>

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

* Finally, Eph 2:4 explains why God plans to bless believers so richly in eternity=> *“Because of His **great love** with which **He has loved us.**”*

Verse 7 describes that blessing itself: *“In order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”*

The word “for” in verse 8 of our own text is significant.

It means “because”=> so John says, “Because” God is love, anyone who doesn’t love doesn’t know God.

If he did know God, he would inevitably love, because that’s the effect personal knowledge of God has on men/women.

Knowledge of God is soul-saving knowledge of the gospel.

When a person comes to know God like that, the Lord pours His love into that person’s heart.

So an absence of love indicates an unregenerate heart.

Again, let’s review why John says we should we love one another?

2) Because God has regenerated us, enabling us to love, through spiritual rebirth, & through personal knowledge of Himself.

1) Because love is from God, who created us in His image to love.

* **The Manifestation of Love** (the ultimate manifestation of God’s love)

[Verse 9]=> *“By this the love of God was **manifested** in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.”*

“Manifested” means “made something visible which couldn’t be seen before.”

God made the infinite greatness of His love visible, manifesting it to man.

He did this by sending His only begotten Son to earth, on a life-giving mission, to save spiritually dead sinners.

God actually even sent His “*only-begotten (monogeneis) Son.*”

The word order here in the original language is impressive:

“His Son, the only begotten One.”

John drags out the words like that, to indicate how great a sacrifice God made, in sending His own Son to earth.

This reminds me of Gen 22:2 (as I suspect it reminded John also),

where God told Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac=>

“Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah” (again, an extended name, prolonged like this to stress Abraham’s love for his son).

Abraham had waited 100 years for the birth of Isaac.

He dearly loved Isaac as a son, a little friend, and as the

patriarch’s connection to God’s whole covenant

promise, which depended on Isaac’s remaining alive.

Having to slay his own son & offer him as a burnt offering, must have torn Abraham apart emotionally.

That trip to Mt. Moriah must have been the most difficult thing Abraham ever had to do.

God may have given us this historical account to suggest how it would hurt Him to send His only-begotten Son into a hostile world, that would kill him.

And yet, He was willing to do so, because of the fervency of His love for us.

There's something else we need to understand about that word "*only-begotten*" (*monogeneis*)=>

It means that X wasn't just God's only Son, He was the only Son of that *geneis* (genus—kind/class, sharing the essence of God's nature).

We are the adopted sons of God, a/w/a His sons through spiritual regeneration, but Jesus is God's only-begotten & only absolute Son, who is inherently of His own nature/kind. And yet, even though He is uniquely God's Son, God was willing to sacrifice Him because He loved us so much.

Do you really see how amazing the love of God is?

God sent His Son to earth "*that we might live.*"

Eph 2:1 says we were spiritually dead, & we had been dead ever since Adam defied God's warning that in the day he ate of the forbidden fruit, he'd surely die (spiritually/physically).

God sent His own Son to overcome our death-sentence due to Adam's sin, because we, the spiritually dead, couldn't save ourselves.

Here then we see the 2 facets of *agape* love, that set it apart from all other loves=>

1) Willingness to sacrifice self.

There could never be a greater self-sacrifice than God's sending His beloved Son to earth to die for us (the Son w/ whom He was well-pleased).

2) Willingness to sacrifice self, for someone else's benefit.

X was God's "*indescribable gift to man*"

(2 Cor 9:15), sent to give man life, & to save him from death.

You won't hear much about that over the next few weeks, but it's the real meaning of Christmas.

This was the ultimate manifestation of God's love.

Again, Jn 3:16=> "*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.*"

The greatness of God's love was measured in the costliness of His sacrifice.

John adds that, not only was God's love-gift manifested "to us," it was manifested "*in us.*"

He revealed/manifested His love "*in us*" by giving us eternal life through Jesus' death, and by pouring His own love into our hearts, through the H.S.

The heaven-sent love in a Xn's heart reaches out to every other Xn, in love, making the Church an earthly display-case of heavenly love.

This brings us back to John's main point=>

Since God displayed such selfless love by sending His only-begotten Son to us, Xns should follow His example, loving one-another sacrificially.

When there is no love in a Xn's life; when he has a critical-spirit, his words are full of bitterness, & he always has something unkind to say about others; we have to wonder how he/she can be a child of such a loving God.

In fact, we have reason to doubt that he actually is.

*** The Magnificence of Love**

[Verse 10]=> *"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us & sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."*

John says, "In this is love" (the epitome/essence of love).

This is love seen in all its magnificence/glory, as it never had been seen before, and could never be seen again.

What is that ultimate illustration of agape love?

God's sending His Son as the propitiation for our sins.

"Propitiation" refers to X's satisfying God's wrath against our sins thru His death, so that God could/would show us mercy and forgive us, if we have placed our faith in X.

By giving up His sinless life as a sacrifice to God, X
annulled sin's power to separate believers from God.

**Someone might ask=> Why was propitiation necessary? Why
didn't God just say, "You've sinned and done what's
wrong, but that's OK. I forgive you"?**

Because that's not justice, and God is a God of
justice/righteousness.

People would have concluded that sin wasn't such a great
issue after all, if God could simply overlook it like
that.

They would have been misled, because God abhors sin.

It disgusts Him, & leaves Him in a state of indignation.

A way had to be found by which God's sense of justice
could be upheld/satisfied/vindicated & yet He could
express His love toward sinners by forgiving them of
their sin, rather than punishing them for it.

The answer to this dilemma was Jesus, "*whom God displayed
publicly as a **propitiation** in His blood thru faith. This was
to demonstrate His righteousness (justice)*" (Rom 3:25).

In the next verse of Rom 3, Paul added that in X's atoning
for our sins in this way, God was both "***just and the
justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus***" (3:26).

What a magnificent demonstration of love this was!

* Even if man had loved God, God would have had no reason to
love man, because compared to Him, man is insignificant.

But John says=> “*not that we loved God.*”

We should have loved Him because we owed Him so much for our very existence, & the beautiful world which He has created for us to live in.

We should have, but we didn't, and yet God's love is such, that He loved us anyway, & sacrificed His Son for us. Not just any son—His only begotten Son, whom He loved far more deeply than Abraham loved Isaac and than we could ever love our children.

* It would only have made sense for us to love God.

He is the loving Father pictured in the parable of the Prodigal Son, who throughout history has patiently waited for His people to return to Him.

Even when He punished the Jews for their nation's sins by sending them into exile, He comforted them with the promise that He would someday restore them.

It would be inhuman for anyone not to love such a beloved Father-figure, who has so kindly protected/provided for us all our lives.

If we loved such a wonderful God with all our heart/soul, we'd only be responding as we reasonably should.

But in saying all that, I'm supposing something that wasn't even true=> We didn't love God as He deserved.

We were indifferent to Him, & we didn't want to hear what He had said to us in His Word.

As individuals, we may have insulted Him by ignoring His grace, His day of worship, His Word/will/people— never even giving Him a thought at all.

Some of us actually struggled against yielding to Him, treating Him like an enemy as He drew us with cords of love towards Himself.

It's difficult to love anyone who mocks/slanders you, or who is hateful/ungrateful in the face of your kindness.

But amazingly, God loved us in spite of all of that, and loved us so much that He sacrificed His own Son for us.

* It may be that the magnificence of God's love has shined brightest in the lives of us who have sinned in the full knowledge of God's Word, and His grace.

We may have sinned with a clenched fist, basking in our sins for years on end, knowing all the while that our vile shameful hypocrisy/defiance displeased the Lord we should have loved/honored.

Knowing that He is a merciful God who is ever ready to forgive, we may have violated what we knew to be His will, blithely/presumptuously asking His forgiveness afterward, as if our sin were a trivial matter.

It was a despicable attempt to exploit His grace.

In the OT, Achan was stoned for such presumption, and Nadab/Abihu were incinerated with fire from heaven because of it.

Based on God's justice, we should have been cast into hell. But God in His love graciously spared us & forgave us. It was living proof that no sinner is beyond the reach of God's love/mercy, until he is dead.

Why would God allow such an outrage & even forgive it, if it cost Him the sacrifice of His own beloved Son?

Amazingly, John's answer=> *"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us & sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."*

The most despicable of sinners simply gives God an opportunity to display the limitless magnitude/magnificence of His love.

Someone: "So I guess we do God a favor by sinning...."

To that, Paul answers, *"Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase?/May it never be!"* (Rom 6:1-2).

Anyone who knows God, has been born of Him, & is the privileged recipient of His holy nature, would never want to do anything but please Him, whose love has been displayed in such a magnificent way.

Let others stretch the limits of God's grace; We will not!
Our love for Him, based on His amazing love for us, leaves us wanting to draw ever closer to Him.

The thought of our sinning against His love appalls &
sickens us, as it threatens to create a sense of
separation between us & the Lord God we love
so much.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small.
Love so amazing, so Divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

“Amazing Love”
December 4, 2011

Text: 1 John 4:7-10

1. In today’s text the Apostle John will *exhort* us to love with God’s love, describing the sacrificial nature of that love as it was *manifested* in His sending Christ to earth; then John will describe the *magnificence* of [12 God’s] love...

* **The Exhortation to Love**

[1 John 4:7]

1 Jn 4:11, 12

Rom 5:5; Phil 2:2

Having exhorted his readers to love, John begins to give them some compelling reasons for doing so...

2. Reason #1—the Source and [14 Origin] of *agape* Love
[Verse 7b]

3. Reason #2—the Believer’s [24 Enablement] to Love
[Verse 7c]

II Pet 1:4; I Jn 1:3

4. Human love can only be raised to the heights of God’s selfless *agape* love when a person comes to know God through a personal relationship with His [8 Son], Jesus Christ.

[Verse 8]

5. God’s love explains much of what we [10 know] about Him.

II Pet 3:9; Mt 6:26; 11:28; Jn 3:16; Eph 2:4, 7

6. Because God is love, anyone who [16 doesn’t] love doesn’t know God.

* **The Manifestation of Love**

[Verse 9]

7. God made the infinite greatness of His love visible, manifesting it to man by sending His only begotten Son to earth to [10 save] spiritually dead sinners.

Gen 22:2; Eph 2:1

8. Two facets of *agape* love that set it apart from all other loves: Willingness to sacrifice self; and willingness to sacrifice self for someone [14 else's] benefit.

II Cor 9:15; Jn 3:16

* **The Magnificence of Love**

[Verse 10]

9. What is the ultimate illustration of love? God's sending His Son as the [26 propitiation] for our sins.

Rom 3:25, 27

10. We should have loved God because we owed Him so much; we should have, but we didn't, and yet God's love is such that He [24 sacrificed] His Son for us.

11. It may be that the magnificence of God's love has shined brightest in the lives of us who have sinned in the full knowledge of God's Word and His [12 grace].

Rom 6:1-2

12. Our love for God, based on His amazing love for us, leaves us wanting to draw ever [14 closer] to Him.