

**Advent 2017**  
**Love is from God**  
**1 John 4:7-19**

**Last Sunday morning, I preached after a week of study in the book of Philippians. It was a blessed morning and I had to agree with the one of you who said after the service, “It must be a blessing to be in the Word all week in preparation for the message.” Indeed! I responded in this way: “One of the greatest blessings of this job is that I get to soak in the text all week. And, one of the greatest challenges of this job is that I have to soak in the text all week.” The week before last, my heart soared as I thought about the joy that is not dependent on circumstances. This past week, my heart struggled as I realized how far short I fall in God’s call for believers to love and how much of a hypocrite I can be on Sunday mornings.**

**In just a few moments, we will stand and read today’s text, 1 John 4:7-19. You may be tempted to feel as convicted about your own failure to love as I have been this week. In fact, you may be tempted to feel a bit uncertain about your relationship with God. Do not, though, succumb to fear. The reason we tend to interpret Scripture in such a way is because of our legalistic tendencies, trying to please God with our good works. As the text is read, allow God’s grace to encourage your heart with his love for you and the patterns of his work in your life. Four points of application will lead us to a time of sharing God’s grace in our lives. If there are not many testimonies, we will go home early, today. Instead of praying after the text is read, it would be good for us to pray before we read the text and ask God to open our spiritual eyes by the Holy Spirit so that we might see Jesus in the text. Let’s pray.       Would you please stand?**

**7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 In this the**

love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. 10 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. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. 17 By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for 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. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. 19 We love because he first loved us.

Please be seated. The first point of application from today's text was touched on last week:

1. God is always the initiator and active agent in our relationship with him

It is always good to stop and contemplate the Incarnation. To think about God becoming man, born to Mary in Bethlehem in stressful conditions – well, either it is crazy, or it is remarkable, well beyond what we typically stop to consider. Why did Jesus come to earth? 1 John alone gives several reasons. 1 John 3:5 tells us that he appeared in order to take away sin and verse 8 says that he appeared to destroy the works of the devil. In the text we just read,

**1 John 4:9 says “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.” Romans 8:3-4 tells us why: “3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh.” God had laid out his requirements for a relationship with him in the law – perfection. Impossible. The flesh could do nothing to please him.**

**My wife, Linda, used to say that when a couple is in serious conflict, unless one person gives 100%, the relationship is going to struggle to recover. The response I have often heard is, “Well, I would give 100%, but you don’t understand my spouse.” Now, before you say, “Hey, you are missing the point,” we should acknowledge that not one of us is capable of giving 100%. Linda’s advice is still absolutely valid in relationships because we *do* get the point of the admonition, but when it comes to being right with God, if he does not take the initiative in the relationship with us, we are doomed. Fortunately, 1 John 4:10 tells us, beautifully, “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.” You will recall that propitiation, as it is used in the NT, means that Jesus’ blood was the satisfaction for sin that God’s holy and righteous wrath required as payment for sin – and – without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin. We could never be good enough, which is why this next point is made in our text:**

**2. Our good works flow from the relationship God has made possible through Jesus, not the other way around**

**If you were tasked with writing an outline for 1 John, you would soon discover that it does not flow like other NT letters to the first-century churches, although it is, indeed, a letter. 1 John reads like a stream of consciousness as John seems to move from one topic to another and then he comes back around again. Unless you take**

**time to read 1 John carefully – and, it is best read with assistance in some form, such as the ESV Study Bible – you may not only be confused – you may be alarmed with such verses like 1 John 3:6, which says, “No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.” John is talking about those who continuously sin with no repentance, but if you take this verse on its own, you would have difficulty understanding that. When you take 1 John as a complete unit, though, you are blessed with the same truth we learned last week – God will complete the work he has begun in you. It was his love that saved unworthy sinners. We did not clean ourselves up so that he would accept us, but he came down to us to meet us at the cross. 1 John 4:19 tells us plainly: “We love because he first loved us,” which segues to our next point:**

### **3. Love is the ultimate “work” that believers perform**

**One of the prominent themes of 1 John is God’s command for believers to love their brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. I don’t know about you, but when I think about good works that I perform for the Lord, I think about raking someone’s yard and tithing and going to church and giving to organizations that help those in need and other similar activities. But the NT tells us in several places that the greatest indication of our love for God is our love for others, particularly our love for God’s people. And how is our love seen? Preferring our brothers and sisters above ourselves, suffering long with our brothers and sisters, helping them to grow spiritually, praying for them, helping them to stand when they have stumbled, and, above all, forgiving them – as Christ has loved and forgiven us.**

**1 John 4, verses 7, 11, and 12: “7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one**

**another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.” Amen. The last point:**

**4. Loving and obedient service flows from an assurance of eternal life rather than from a sense of obligation**

**One of the commentaries that I used in preparation for this message was written by Gary Burge, who was, at the time he wrote the commentary, professor of NT Studies at Wheaton College. He asked 40 students to write a one-page essay, analyzing whether their lives had been shaped by the threat of the law or by the wonder of God’s grace. Here is what Burge said about the answers: Quote, “I was devastated by the results. Over 90 percent of the class admitted privately that the possibility of God’s disfavor and wrath had shaped their Christian outlook since childhood. God’s unending love was not foremost in their minds, but his possible displeasure was. Christianity, they reported, was really about following the rules. When I told them it was not, you could hear a pin drop. Some privately commented that this was the first time they had heard such ‘good news.’” Close quote.**

**We will close this portion of our service by reading 1 John 4:15-19, but this time, rather than reading it with a law mentality, which would approach it as, “I better keep up to God’s standard or I am in big trouble,” – instead of that sort of reading, allow God’s love and grace to inform your understanding of the text. Recognize that God has assured you of his love through Jesus and that the kind of fear that comes from feeling like you can never please him does not come from the Holy Spirit. God loves you, and it is that assurance in your heart that should lead you to obedience and love for others. Let his love do for you what you cannot do in your own strength. 1 John 4:15-19:**

**15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. 17 By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for 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. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. 19 We love because he first loved us.**