

God is Love series part 1 – God is love

Scripture references from the ESV

I John 4: 7-21 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. 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 Saviour 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. ²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot ^a love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Human beings are not just thinkers. Primarily we are people with a capacity to love. We love people places, events and things. Our hearts are drawn to what we see as attractive and it is this love that drives our wills. When we:

- love our family, we will spend time with them, seek their welfare and stand up for them when they are wronged
- love money, we will work hard to earn more, and save hard to accumulate what we have earned
- love self, we will seek out 'me time', put our wants ahead of others and pursue leisure.

What we love will motivate our wills so that we act in favour of what we love.

This capacity for love comes from God. The Bible tells us that **God is love (vv8 above)**. It is a statement of who God is and it defines his nature. It is what makes him God. God is also wise, so human beings are thinkers too but we have been created in the image of God and therefore, as God is love, it stands to reason that we are creatures who love.

However, sin has disordered our love so that we do not love what we were meant to love.

- We were created by God with a capacity to love so that we would love God.
- Sin has curved us in on ourselves so that now we love everything but God.

We see nothing attractive in God because sin has blinded us to his beauty. Instead, we see beauty in ourselves, in places in our world or perhaps in the stars in the heavens and we love those things instead of loving God. Sadly, because of sin, sometimes we see beauty in things that are ugly.

Sin has so distorted our hearts that we see beauty in everything except God, and love everything except God. That leads to eternal death unless God intervenes and we see from this text (above) that God has intervened.

We see the beauty of God put on display to enable us to know that we are loved by God

and to win our hearts so that we come to love God, to love one another and have the assurance that we are saved.

In his writings, John makes three God is... statements.

1. **God is spirit (John 4:24 see p4)** -he doesn't exist in a physical form like us, (except in the person of his son, the Lord Jesus Christ) and therefore isn't limited to time and space. He is present everywhere, all of the time.
2. **God is light (1 John 1:5 see p4)** – he is holy and righteous, and the standard of all that is right.
3. **God is love (vv8,16 above)**. It is not just that God loves us – God **IS** love and that is why he loves.

Love is the very essence of his being. God is celebrated in:

- Creation – we see his wisdom and power to speak the universe into existence
- The patriarchs – we see his grace to men like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Job
- Israel – we see his grace to establish Israel as a nation, to forgive them when they sinned against him. We see

his grace as he defeated their enemies, and as he led them through the wilderness, with his provision for them

- The prophets – who God used to speak his words of grace to the nations
- The New Covenant - God sent his own Son, defeating sin, Satan and death through his sacrifice on the cross and resurrection to eternal life.

When you see all the ways God has worked, you may wonder what this God is like. What kind of God has done all this?

It is the glorious person who is the **God who is, and ever has been, love**

The crucial factor here is not to have more knowledge about God's love, but to have our hearts awakened to love him.

It is important to know theological truths but we need to have our hearts moved by those truths so that we love God because we know God loves us.

We need to see the God who is love

1) Love within the Godhead (vv8-10 above). This aspect of God's love helps us to see his essential nature.

God the Father sent God the Son to save us from sin. God the Father is often presented as being angry with sinners and wanting to destroy them, while God the Son is seen as the one who loves humanity and appeases his angry Father's wrath. In this view, the Father is not seen as a God of love. Yet these verses tell us that it was the Father who sent the Son, and therefore God the Father is love. Who did the Father love?

- The Father loved us but first he loved his Son and loves him throughout eternity. When Jesus was on earth, the Father spoke of him as '**My beloved Son**' (**Matt 3:17, 17:5** see p4). Jesus lived with the assurance of the Father's love, and said on more than one occasion '**The Father loves the Son**' (**John 3:35, 5:20** see p4)
- It is also recorded that God the Son loves God the Father (**John 14:31** see p4)
- As love is a fruit of the Spirit, so the Spirit also is included in this love of Father and Son.

Within God, as a trinity of three persons - Father, Son and Spirit – there has been an eternal love. Love flows between them endlessly because **God is love.**

However, we cannot see God, so how do we know that God is love? All this might feel a bit abstract thus far. We need to see God's love displayed in flesh and blood so that we can really know his love. Having shown us the love within the Godhead, John goes on to show us....

2) Love that overflows to us. (vv9-10 above). God's love is a shared love and it is seen by us when

God the Father sent his only Son into the world.

2000 years ago, God's love took on human flesh in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ who, in his life on earth, showed us what God's love in action looked like:

- Jesus defended women and children, who were marginalised in that culture
- Jesus healed sick people, including those who were his enemies
- Jesus fed hungry people when they had no food
- Jesus taught the people because their spiritual leaders had failed to care for them
- Jesus had a heart of compassion that resulted in real tears being wept over the sorry plight of humanity.

If you want to know that God is love and loves you, then look at Jesus - God in human flesh who is love incarnate.

John tells us that God the Father showed his love by sending his one and only Son (the one who is most precious to him) to die for us. He is the propitiation for our sins, turning the wrath of God away from us and on to him (Jesus) as our substitute. God's love is not the kind of love that turns a blind eye to sin. God is love, but he is light.

God is a holy God

He burns with anger against our sin of failing to love him (God), which shows itself in a failure to obey his commands and especially our failure to put him first in our lives. God's anger is not like our outbursts of anger, which are sinful.

- God's anger is his settled, righteous, hostility towards sin and sinners, that demands their eternal destruction.

At the same time, God is love and so his heartbeat towards sinners is the heartbeat of love, causing a divine dilemma. How can God justly deal with sin and show love to sinners? He does this by providing a substitute to absorb the righteous wrath of God for us. At great cost to himself, God the Father gave his eternal Son whom he loves to atone for our sin. This is the love of God the Father for us.

The greatest sorrow and burden you can lay on the Father, the greatest unkindness you can do him,
is **not** to believe that he loves you. (John Owen)

The love of God the Son for us is seen in his willingness to come and lay down his life for us. He did this of his own accord, out of love for his Father and out of love for us.

God does all this so that **we might live through him (v9 above)**. This means that we are caught up into the life of love that exists within the Godhead. That is what it means to be saved. This love flows between the three persons of the Trinity, and the Father sends the Son so that we might come into this ever-flowing relationship of love in order to

- really and deeply know God's love for us
- really and deeply love God as Father, Son and Spirit

Jesus did not primarily die to save you from Hell (which is the consequence of rejecting him). Jesus came that we might have life and come into this love relationship with God. Then, like Jesus, we will love God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit, and, at the same time love one another and love the world that is lost and dying without knowledge of Jesus Christ.

This is a wonderful thing for us, but take care. It is possible to have just an intellectual knowledge of God and just a thinking man's response to the glorious truth that **God is love**. However, we are not just minds on legs! We have a heart that was created to love God, not to love things or sin. Out of that love for God, we love other people.

We need to know the truth that God is love

That truth is to be known in our hearts so that it will be lived out as love for God and love for others.

- How can we see this truth move from intellectual knowledge into heart knowledge that transforms us into lovers of God?

The answer is found in **Ephesians 3:14-19**, where Paul prays: **that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love,¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**

We will only come to this heart knowledge as we turn from sin and pray for the Holy Spirit to work this miracle in us. God is love and has shown his love by sending his Son to repair the relationship between God and us – these are facts - but in response we pray: **Lord will you give me strength to know this love of yours in a way that is more than intellectual knowledge. Give me strength to know your love in a way that assures me I am loved by you and enables me to love you with all my heart soul, mind and strength and to love my neighbour as myself.**

John 4:24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

1 John 1:5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

Matt 3:17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son,^[a] with whom I am well pleased.”

Matt 17:5 He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son,^[a] with whom I am well pleased;

John 3:35 The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand

John 5:20 For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing.

John 14:31 but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.