

Greetings, and welcome to session 2 of this series on “Abounding in the Good Works of God.” Today we're going to focus on God's nature of love.

1 John 4:16

And we have known and have believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him.

Let's take a moment to pause and reflect on these three powerful words, “God is love.” And specifically, I want to look at the word “is.” This is not saying that God *gives* love, although he certainly does. And it's not saying that God knows a lot about love, although that would be true. This is talking about who God is. And it defines him in direct association with love.

1 John 4:8

Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.

God's nature is a nature of love. The word “know” in this verse is a translation of the Greek word *ginosko* and it means “to know and to understand by way of experience.” We cannot truly know and experience God unless we recognize his love. You cannot separate the two. If you take away love from God, you no longer have God. Whenever we associate with God, we are coupled with his love. And when we walk away from love, we are also walking away from God.

Romans 5:8

But God shows his own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died in our place.

The word “shows” in this verse is a translation of the Greek word *synistemi* and it means “to bring together or to unite.” God did this uniting, not while we deserved it. He did this while we were sinners. He reached out his hand in an invitation to fellowship with us. He did this by allowing his only begotten son Jesus Christ to die on the cross.

I do not know of any other religion in the world who worships a God like this. A God who loves us when we did not deserve it. Religions other than Christianity generally require acts of service by men in order to gain God's favor. God did not require us to perform any righteous acts in order to win his favor. He granted it to us unconditionally while we were sinners. This is the *agapao* love of God. Isn't that wonderful?

1 John 4:9-10

9 This is how the love of God was revealed among us: that God has sent his only begotten Son into the world so that we could 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 atoning sacrifice for our sins.

When did God do this for us? After we deserved it? No. He did this while we were dead in trespasses and sins. This is the complete opposite of the philosophy of the world. They tell you that you should not give anything to someone until they deserve it. You go to work at your job and then you earn a paycheck. You treat someone nice and then you earn the right to be treated nice. But that is not God's way. His way is unconditional love.

It took me many years after I became a Christian to believe and accept the love that God had for me, unconditionally. Until then, I was relatively lonely, keeping to myself. I didn't have many friends. I was afraid to open my heart to people, thinking that once they really knew me, they would see my weaknesses and wouldn't like me. Then one day a fellow believer shared something with me that I've never forgotten. They said that the root cause of my loneliness problem was that I didn't believe that God really loved me. At first, I got defensive. I was in denial and said to that person, "That's not true. I know that God loves me!"

Later on, I got quiet. I went off by myself and couldn't stop thinking about what had been said. I struggled with it in my mind until finally realizing that they were right. I really didn't believe that God loved me, because I didn't think that I deserved his love. I went into a private place. It was a small pavilion. There was no one else around. I cried. Then I cried some more. And finally, I reached out to God in desperation. I asked him to embrace me with his love. And to help me to understand it.

It didn't happen overnight. Days went by. Weeks went by. Months went by. But every day I seemed to grow a little closer to understanding what God's love really was. And over time, I grew to understand that God loved me just the way I was. He didn't look at me and say, "You did this wrong and, because of that, I don't love you anymore." Over time I gradually realized that although I had sinned many times, God's love was still there. And he still cared for me the same, regardless of what sins I had committed.

When you're with other Christians, you can put on quite a show. You can fool people into thinking that everything is wonderful. My question to you is, "Do you really understand, and are you really experiencing, God's love?"

1 John 4:11

Beloved, if God loved us in this way, we also are obligated to love one another.

We cannot do God's will unless we truly know God's love. We can be very religious. But to really walk with the true God, we have to know, understand and finally accept his love. Then, once we experience God's love for our self, God is asking us to reach out to others with that same love.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels but do not have love, I have become a sounding bronze, or a clanging cymbal.

2 And if I prophesy, and know all the sacred secrets and all the knowledge, and if I have all trust so that I can move mountains, but I do not have love, I am nothing.

3 And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

It is impossible for us to do God's Will unless we know and experience his love. And anything we do without his love as motivation, regardless of how religious it looks, will not bring profit to us. That is what these verses in Corinthians say, and that is what they mean. So, it is very important that we get this right. We need to recognize God's love for us. Then, our acts of

service toward others will bear fruit. Not only for them, but they will bring profit to us.

Matthew 22:36-40

36 *“Teacher, which commandment is the greatest one in the law?”*

37 *And he said to him, “**Love Yahweh your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.***

38 *This is the greatest and first commandment.*

39 *And the second is like it: **Love your neighbor as yourself.***

40 *On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and also the prophets.”*

Do you see this? Every commandment of God hinges upon us doing these two things. Some religious people like to make living for God very complicated. They say that if you truly love God then you're going to have to dress up really nice and show up for church every Sunday morning. Or they may say that if you really love God you would never go dancing.

They try to make rules and regulations about what it means to love God. But God is love and he has given us the freedom to manifest his love toward others in a variety of ways. The important thing we need to understand is that, in our interactions with people, whether inside the church or out in the world, we need to be manifesting God's love.

1 John 4:19-21

19 *We love because he first loved us.*

20 *If anyone says, “I love God,” and yet hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love his brother or sister whom he has seen is not able to love God whom he has not seen.*

21 *And we have this commandment from him, whoever loves God must love his brother and sister also.*

Showing up for church every Sunday morning doesn't automatically make us a true Christian of faith. Whether or not we choose to attend church, the crucial thing is that we show our love for God the way he wants it to be shown. And God defines that 'showing' based on how we treat our brothers and sisters. If we treat them with hate, then we are not showing our love

for God. And if we treat them with his unconditional love, regardless of how they treated us, regardless of who they are and what they may have done or didn't do, regardless of how they look or how they didn't look, regardless of their race or color of their skin, or any other reason, God's requirement, if we truly love him, is to love them with that same love that he gave and continues to give to us.

Now I'm not trying to discourage anyone from attending church fellowships. I think they're great, the Bible encourages it and I think we need them in order to get edified and to be able to build up other Christians around us. So, go to your church fellowships. But I'm saying, don't be a hypocrite. Don't go to church and get all lovey-dovey with people and then when you are away from church you start treating people like dirt. That is not how we're supposed to do things. God has given us his love and he expects us throughout the week, when we're at church and when we're not in church, to be the same person and to be a person that walks with acts of kindness and love towards other people. That is God primary desire for our life. And all the commandments in the Bible are built upon loving God with all our heart soul mind and strength, and to love our neighbor as our self.

Many of these attributes of God's love are listed in 1st Corinthians chapter 13. On your own, it would be a good idea to read through them. It says the love of God is patient. The love of God is kind. It doesn't envy. It doesn't brag. It's not self-seeking. It's not provoking. And it doesn't keep a record of wrongs. How many times have you heard someone bring up something that you did wrong years ago? This is not the love of God. We do not bring up past wrongs. We forgive past sins and move on.

What does it mean to love people with the love of God? In the lowest common denominator, we are to love people just for being them. Without any other qualifications. To treat them with respect. To let them know that we love them just the way they are, with no strings attached. God put that person on this Earth, and he loves them. And the greatest thing we can do for someone is to let them know that God loves them. They don't see God, they see you. And so, it is vitally important that we show God's love to them through demonstration in the way we treat them.

So, if you see someone in need, reach out to help them. I remember one time when I was in school and the leadership in the school made a big deal out of saying that they wanted to make sure that we showed up on time for classes. That we were not late. And I was walking to class one day and I looked over at a bench and there was a friend of mine, and he was crying.

I didn't know this person really well, but I knew him somewhat and I looked at my watch and I had a decision to make. I could either go on to my class. I would make it there on time and that would make me look good in front of the staff. Or, I could choose to love this person who has a need right now, who was crying, and be late for class. Well, what do you think I chose to do? I sat down on the bench and I asked my friend, "What's wrong? Why are you crying?" And I was able to minister to him.

You see, walking in love doesn't mean that we dot all of our "i"s and cross all of our "t"s. It means that we reach out to people that have need. If someone needs emotional help, be a good listener. Put yourself in their shoes. Then minister to them with the wisdom that God has given you from his word. We did not deserve God's love. Neither should we choose to love others simply because they do something to justify it.

When my first child was born, I didn't know how to raise him. Now my children are 24, 22 and 15 years old. And I'm sure that I didn't raise them by the book. I know there are lots of books out there on parenting. And they tell you all the right things that you need to do. I may have not done what those books say to do. But one thing I know for sure is that I loved my children with the love of God.

It's the love of God I believe that enabled my children to grow up right. And today I can proudly say, all three of them are doing wonderful with their lives. And it's not because I'm great. It's because God is great. God is love. And his love is the most powerful motivating force in the universe. And if we will recognize and understand his love, and then manifest it to other people, we will likely have a huge impact on their lives.

1 Corinthians 13:13

But now remains trust, hope, love, these three, and the greatest of these is love.

Which one is the greatest? It is not trust. It's not hope. The greatest of these is love. If you are looking for the one key in your endeavor to live for God, and to do his will, this is it! To walk in love. Nothing is more important. Everything else needs to take a backseat. There's no greater way to serve God. And in fact, we cannot truly serve God without this love. And that is the reason I made sure to cover this topic in session two rather than in a later session. This has to be the foundation for everything I'm going to teach you from here on out. Because, as we read in 1st Corinthians 13 verses 1 through 3, we can give all our money to the poor, we can give our body to be burned, but if we don't do these things out of love, we will profit nothing.

Now that we have established the importance of love, we are ready to delve into a topic that when I first learned about this, it changed my life completely as a Christian. I'm so excited about the next session. We're going to talk about how God, who is the creator of the heavens and the earth, desires to have a personal, intimate fellowship with you. Until then, remember, God loves you and so do I.

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