

February 13, 2022 - I John 4:7-11 / Eph. 4:1-3 - “Love and Unity”

Introduction:

Tomorrow is Valentine’s Day and it is a day for matters of the heart. It is a day of flowers and chocolates and romance. Many couples will engage in expressing their love for one another. That's a wonderful and precious thing for all of us to do.

But what really is love? Love is not just an emotion that we keep hidden in our hearts. Real love produces virtues. As Paul says to the Corinthians, “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude... Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endure all things.” It is so simple yet defies a simple definition. If there ever was a topic that could qualify as the most thought about, written about, talked about, and sung about, it is certainly love. There is a lot of hype about love. Magazine racks are full with stories of love and books on the subject.

Yet, the reality of it all is that we live in a world where people are searching for true lasting love. There are many wonderful love affairs that people learn about and see in this world and they want the same thing. The Bible tells of many such wonderful love stories like; Abraham and Sarah; Isaac and Rebecca and what of Jacob and Rachel. Remember his love for her. *-And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her. Genesis 29: 20*

God’s demonstration of love for us is nothing short of extravagant! This is one love affair that is not only good for us, but it is altogether necessary. No human being can comprehend God’s love for his creation. Hidden in this section of John's epistle is the famous statement that "God is love" it is a simple definition but necessitates clarification. We must remember not to ever twist the equation because it would not be true. Yes God is love but love is not God because God is so much more. You see the world has its definition of what love is and it is corrupt in comparison. “This is how He showed his love among us: God sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him” (I John 4:9) I’d like us to look at two aspects of God's love.

I. God’s Love is Perpetual v.7-8

Praise ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for *he is good*: for his love *endureth* for ever. Psalms 106:1

1. The love John speaks of comes from the ancient Greek noun *agape*; it is the concept of a self-giving love that gives without demanding or expecting re-payment. The verb is *agapaō*. This love comes exclusively from God and to give this kind of love one must know the author and giver - God. We love one another because we are loved by God, and have received that love, and live in light of it. John contends that there is something that is given to every believer when they are born of God; a love is imparted to their life that they did not have before. Christians are born anew by God’s Spirit and this love continues.

2. To further reinforce God perpetual love for us is our eternal security in Christ. In Romans chapter 8 Paul asks a question in verse 35, *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?*

The word used for separate (*chorizo*) comes from a word meaning "space" to separate one's self from. The love of Christ refers to Christ's love for the believer. Can anything or anyone put a distance between Christ's love and us? NO! Our position in the face of all our adversaries is secure. Paul then answers this question in verse 37 ...a conqueror overcomes his enemy and makes him his defeated foe. To be more than a conqueror is to go a step farther and make an enemy your friend. So, the things listed in verses 35-36 that Satan sends as adversaries to harm us, God changes into our friends that help us. In verses 38-39 Paul lists every possible spiritual and intangible adversary:

4. These matters of the heart are difficult things. Just as we can't reduce them to flowers and candy so we can't separate ourselves from the assurances Paul gives of God's love. Our only hope, our only sure and constant foundation, is in the Word that changes our hearts. Salvation is a matter of the heart. For the scriptures say, *For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. Ro.10: 10*

5. 1 John 4:8 states that we are to "agapeo". So a person who has never experienced God's love won't love God's way. We can conclude by this that the world's concept of love is very different from God's. It is God's type of love that is lasting when practice in our relationships. God is love – Pure love, true love it comes only from this source. John drives his point home by asserting the negative that of not knowing God is evidenced by not loving with the special love of God a sacrificial love or agape love.

II God's Love is sacrificial v. 9-11

1. The legend of St. Valentine himself bears this out. Valentine was regarded as a martyred saint of the church. The most popular tradition holds that he was imprisoned under the Roman emperor Claudius II. Claudius had established a decree that soldiers could not be married, for he believed that they made better soldiers. But Valentine helped Christian couples to marry in secret. However, he was a faithful proclaimer of the faith seeking to share the love of Christ to the empire. When he tried to convert Claudius himself, Claudius commanded him to renounce his faith or be beaten with clubs and beheaded. It turns out that matters of the heart have consequences. It did for Jesus his ultimate example.

2. This act of Christ death is known as the "vicarious atonement." It means to "take the place of another." In the atonement, Christ took our place, receiving the full wrath of God. The climax of this was when the sins of the world were placed upon Jesus. John 15:13 says, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. It was the ultimate act of love: to die in another's place. The word "manifested" – means to make visible, to make known the ultimate act of self- sacrifice is Christ death on the Cross.

III. Gods' Love Promotes Unity vv.1-3

1. In Ephesians 4 verses 2 and 3 Paul mentions five characteristics of the heart, five inner attitudes, five inward graces, five things that God desires in the life of a believer. They are progressive, and they lead to the concept of unity. The goal of this whole thing is unity.

Notice it in verse 3, the end of it all is “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

2. We must *endeavor to keep* this unity – we do not create it. God never commands us to create unity among believers. He has created it by His Spirit; our duty is to recognize it and keep it. We promote the unity of the church by caring for one another. In Paul’s letter to the Romans he includes the most extensive “one another” profile.

1. We are “members of one another” (Rom. 12:5).
2. We are to “be devoted to one another in brotherly love” (12:10a)
3. We are to “give preference to one another in honor” (12:10c).
4. We are to “be of the same mind with one another” (12:16a)
5. We are to “accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us” (15:7).
6. We are to “admonish one another” (15:14).
7. We are to “greet one another” (16:16).
8. Serve one another” (Gal. 5:13). & “Bear one another’s burdens” (6:2).
9. Show “forbearance to one another” (Eph. 4:2 & 32)- “forgiving one another”.
10. Be “subject to one another” (5:21). Encourage one another (1 Thess. 5:11).

3. God’s goal in the church is unity – a loving, invincible, unconquerable, indivisible unity, because that’s what shows Christ to the world. That manifests His wholeness. And that’s what says to the world this is not just another human institution. Human institutions are not able to pull this kind of love off. So the unity is the goal.

Conclusion:

Throughout the Bible, the love of a husband and wife is compared to God’s love (Isaiah 54:5; Ephesians 5:25; Revelation 21:2). Jesus is the groom and the church is His bride. God showed His love for us by sending Christ to face death so we wouldn’t have to die for our sins (John 3:16).

Whether we’re married or single, we can remember that God’s love is stronger than anything we could imagine. So on Valentine day when we focus on matters of the heart, St. Valentine is not just a reminder of how he married those who were in love. Rather let it be a reminder that he died believing with his heart and confessing with his mouth that Jesus is Lord.