

Dear Fellow Redeemed by Him Who holds the key to the treasures of heaven,

John speaks here of the relationship between God and Love. Some would say that Love is God, which personifies love, and makes love into a god, so that love itself is worshiped and exalted as an idol. But God has already revealed Himself as a godhead of three persons.

When John declares in v. 8 of our text that "God is love," it is not his intention to give love its own separate personality, but to teach that love is already personified in God. John wants us to know that love cannot be correctly understood or fully experienced without God. God shows us what love is, and love shows us God.

JOHN SAYS: "GOD IS LOVE!"

I.

In his Gospel, John reveals WHO the true God is. He is **"the Word made flesh" – Jesus Christ.** But here in John's first letter to the churches he tells us WHAT God is. Love is the WHAT about God that attracts our faith so that we may be saved and call upon Him in prayer.

Suppose you need a doctor to treat cancer. His name might be Smith or Jones or whomever. You don't care so much about WHO the doctor is, but WHAT He is. Is he good? Does he care enough to listen? Is he experienced? When you know WHAT the doctor is you may be willing to entrust yourself to him.

If God were not love, but only power, or only holiness, we might have serious doubts about placing our trust in Him, and counting on Him for salvation and every good thing. But since God IS love, since love is the very essence of His person, our hearts may be drawn to put our trust in Him. When God draws the sinner to Himself by the Gospel of Christ, He draws us by His love.

II.

But can it really be so? The sentence, **"God is love,"** seems so abstract, how do we grab and hold it? Luther wrote: "If one could paint and carve Love, he would have to make a picture that is really no longer human. . . . not even angelic or heavenly, but God Himself!" Who can paint a picture like that? Even if all the greatest artists in human history

could combine their talents to paint such a picture, it would still be only a symbol of God as Love.

But John speaks of this Love in concrete terms; it is not a symbolic painting, but reality. See what he says in vs. 9-10: **“In this the love of God was revealed toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the satisfactory payment for our sins.”**

God made His Son the means by which our sins are entirely removed!

So many think that “God is love” means that He is soft-hearted, unable and unwilling to punish sin. But the love that made His own Son the payment for the sins of this whole, wicked world, hates sin, and punished sin in the body and soul of Jesus Christ!

God’s love is not just an emotion; it’s a DOING! When you believe what He has done through Christ for you, you know His love. Christ was not a fictional character who symbolized divine love. He was the very revelation of God’s love!

Jesus really came into human flesh and lived a holy life in our places.

He really died for the sins of the whole world, and He was really raised from the dead **“because of our being declared righteous”** (Rom. 4:25) by His sufferings and death! All this, John says, is God’s love set in concrete, historical fact!

Facts are stubborn things. Paintings, poetry, and symbols of God’s love may be entirely blown away by the winds of doubt and fear. But if we drive our doubts and fears straight up against the FACTS which God’s love has revealed and performed in Christ, then our doubts and fears are shattered to pieces! When we take the FACTS concerning Christ to our hearts through faith, we see how they answer our fears and soothe our troubled conscience. Then we know the true God by experience and we know that He IS love!

III.

Now John says that this love of God for us will bring forth faith’s love as fruit. Twice in our text John addresses his Christian readers as **“beloved.”** The Christian is loved by the God of heaven and earth! Can there be any higher privilege for undeserving sinners like us than to be loved by God?

With such a privilege comes responsibility. John says: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love, does not know God, for God is love." For Christians to love one another is not a "take it or leave it" proposition. It's a natural result of being "born of God" through faith in Christ.

If we are born of our earthly parents, it's not our choice that we look like them. So also, if we are reborn by the working of God's Spirit through the Gospel of Christ, it's not our choice to love one another. We will and we do love one another! This is the nature of our God from Whom we have received our new life by faith in Christ.

Why then do we so often fail to love one another as we have been reborn to love one another? Our failure is because of the old sinful nature that continues to fight against our reborn, spiritual nature! John knows about this battle in the Christian. That's why he adds the encouragement of v. 11: **"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."**

Our love for one another is not only a FRUIT of our new life as children of God; it is also a DEBT which we owe our God in heaven for His love toward us. John wants us to remember this debt.

What happens if you and I do not think about the great, undeserved love of God for us, as it is revealed in Christ our Savior? Well, then we will love only those among us whom we feel deserve our love. We will show love only toward those who appeal to us for some reason.

If we have only an affectionate feeling for others, we will easily feel insulted by them. We will take offense when someone does not pay attention to us. Sweet words are NOT the love we are to have for one another. A Christian congregation cannot prosper by mere affection, any more than a child can prosper and grow on confections.

That's why John does not use the word for love which means "affection." He uses the Greek word which means "a deep understanding of another's real needs and a desire that tries to fulfill those needs." It's the same word John used in His Gospel when he wrote: **"God so LOVED the world, that He gave His only begotten Son"**

Now, if God SO loved us, we ought to also SO love one another. We see another's faults, even as our God sees ALL our faults. But even as He loved us in spite of all our sins against Him, and purposed to save us from

them through His Son, so also we are to ACT in love for one another in spite of all our faults. We are to put away our stinking pride, even as God's love saved us not by pride, but through the humiliation of His only Son!

When this genuine love from God, shows itself among us, there will also be a lasting affection. The more one another in our DOING, the more we will also live in true affection for each other. God grant us grace to be more like Him Who IS love! Amen.