

## Love's Ground and Evidence

February is a short month, but one in which we often celebrate, in a small way, the virtue of love. While “love” as an idea has been diminished in recent years to speak mainly of romantic and physical love—that indeed have their place—it is important that we look at what the Word of God declares concerning the highest kind of love. First John 4:7-12 gives us significant teaching concerning this *agape* love.

First of all, **God Himself defines love**, because it comes from Him (vv. 7-8). Our love for one another begins with God Who loved His Son (John 3:16), and Who loves us. John declares that one of God's core attributes is love—that is, the self-giving, self-sacrificing love that is epitomized in Jesus Christ.

But how do we know that God is love, other than this mere declaration?

God showed His love to us in **sending His Son to live** (v. 9). Our previous condition before coming to Christ was that of spiritual death (Ephesians 2:1, 5; Ephesians 4:18). We were dead in our sins, and experienced the contentedness of death. But the Bible says Jesus was sent that we might live—through Him. The Christian is no longer living in himself, but in and for Christ.

God also showed His love to us in **sending His Son to die** (v. 10). The beginning of all this was God's love for us—not our love for Him, because that did not exist. But Jesus came to us to die. His mission was to be the propitiation for our sins. Propitiation is a long word that means “to turn away [God's] wrath.” God's anger was against our sin and its destruction. His wrath against sin demands death as the penalty for that sin. God wanted to redeem a people for Himself, and so sent His perfect Son to satisfy that wrath and God's holy law (1 John 2:2). If we want God to show us His love, He simply points to the Cross on which Jesus died. That Cross is where justice and love came together perfectly.

**God is our example** or model of love (v. 11). John says, “Look: God loved us in this great way, when we were unlovable by any stretch, that therefore we can love one another. Our misdeeds against one another are tiny in contrast to our sin against God. The Bible says, “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we

shall be saved by His life.”

Finally, **love is the evidence**, not only that God loved us, but that God is working within us (v. 12). Jesus told His disciples, “I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them,” (John 17:26). This is staggering—that the same love of the Father with which He loved Jesus is also the same love with which the Father loves us. That God is transforming us, day by day, into the image of His Son—also reflects that same love. We experience that love more deeply as we grow into the likeness of Jesus. In fact, it is an upward spiral: we experience God's love in trusting Jesus to save us from our sin, that love grows as we realize the depths from which God has saved us. As that love deepens, God's fellowship grows greater, causing us to love in a more complete way.

Thank God for His love for you and for the Church!

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