

Abiding Love

Adoring God Chapter 15

1 John 4:7-8

I. The Text Opened

A. 1 John 4:7-8

1. "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." (1 John 4:7-8).
2. God is Love.
 - a) In John 4:24 we have "God is Spirit."
 - b) In ch. 1:5 "God is Light."
 - c) Here "God is Love."
 - (1) *The first indicates the substance of the Divine nature-personal, conscious, intelligent Spirit.*
 - (2) *The second declares the perfection of that nature in knowledge and in purity.*
 - (3) *The third shows the benevolence of the Divine nature in its regard for those who are the creatures of his power and the subjects of his grace.*
 - (4) *These three words contain more information about God than all the sacred books of the East put together.*
 - (5) *They are a revelation.*
 - (6) *Men are taught how to think about God, and if they keep within the lines marked out by these three words, they cannot go far wrong.*
 - (7) *This light thrown on God's nature gives us the clue to the meaning of his works and ways in nature, providence, and grace.*
 - (a) *The three spheres give us the triple unfolding of infinite love, and nothing else.*

II. The Doctrine from the Text

A. Doctrine: God is love.

1. God loves because it is the essence of His nature; His love flows from His goodness.
 - a) When the Bible speaks of God's love, sometimes it is in reference to His special regard for the children of men as His offspring, seeing He is the Father of the spirits of all men.
 - b) Other times it is in reference to that peculiar, mysterious, sovereign, immeasurable love for His own chosen people.
2. God's love is twofold in this – internal and external.
 - a) The internal aspect of God's love is that He loves Himself perfectly because He is the object of perfect glory and uncompromised holiness.
 - (1) *Christ's own testimony is that "The Father loves the Son," (John 3:35).*
 - b) God's love of Himself extends to the Father, Son and Spirit.
 - c) Not only do the three persons of the Godhead share love with one another, but God loves Himself perfectly as the first and best Being that exists.
 - (1) *He has love for Himself above all, being the supreme object of love, and infinitely worthy of being loved.*
 - (a) *I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images. (Isa. 42.8)*

3. The external aspect of God's love is that He loves His reflection in creation, His image in mankind, and Christ in His elect.

B. All Things for His Glory

1. The Creator is His own end in His creation, and does all things for Himself, for His own sake.

a) For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? and I will not give my glory unto another. (Isa. 48:11)

2. And so, it must of necessity follow that God seeks His own glory and His own perfect happiness in consideration of that which is best, as He is the first and best Being in existence.

a) For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen. (Rom. 11:36)

3. In turn, He furnishes man with everything he needs to glorify God so that God's glory is also manifest in His people. Jonathan Edwards says, "Because God loves Himself, loves His own end, He provided the necessary means to have clear, evident and distinct knowledge, so His creatures would know Him. It is unreasonable to think that God would always keep silent and never say anything to mankind because of this. Other creatures were made for man, but man was made for God."

a) If creation is to be happy, it will be happy by mirroring the glory of the Creator. Since man fell in the Garden, God's overflowing love saves man from perishing in order that His holy reflection can be seen in them through grace.

(1) But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. (1 Cor. 1:30-31)

4. If a king marries the daughter of a poor family, his royalty is communicated to her by the union of marriage.

a) Though she was a beggar before, she becomes a queen.

b) It is the dignity, office, and quality of the king that makes her so.

c) Likewise, those who are in Christ – God's chosen people – partake of His excellence.

d) By this union they are one with God, and God is one with them, which is the bond of perfection.

e) God delights to see Himself in His people. This is what gives Him pleasure, for His own sake.

f) Jonathan Edwards says: God's infinite beauty is His infinite mutual love of Himself. They that don't see the glory of God's holiness, can't see anything of the true glory of His mercy and grace; they see nothing of the glory of those attributes. The world was made for the Son of God especially. For God made the world for Himself from love to Himself.

5. When God takes up residence in the believer, it is the reflection of His divine nature that He sees in the Christian, and which in turn is what He nurtures and loves.

a) God loves Himself in the Christian – His perfection.

b) And He loves Christ in the Christian – Christ's perfection.

c) Augustine says: For He could not but love the members of His Son seeing that He loveth the Son Himself; nor is there any reason for loving His members, save that He loveth Himself.

6. God loves Himself in His creation.

- a) He created everything for Himself.
 - (1) *I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him. (Isaiah 43:6-7)*
- b) A person may not like the truth that both internally and externally God is self-seeking.
- c) If He is self-seeking, you may wonder how He could really be loving, as one of the characteristics given in the beautiful discourse on love in 1 Corinthians 13 says, “love does not seek its own,” (1 Cor. 13:5).
- d) Scripture teaches that God’s ultimate goal is Himself, to be praised and glorified by His creation.
 - (1) *God says, “For my own sake, for my own sake I act, my glory I will not give to another,” (Isaiah 48:11).*
 - (2) *God loves Himself most, as He is the sum total and singular encapsulation of ultimate beauty, supremacy, holiness, righteousness, loveliness, and goodness.*
- e) Since God is unique as the most glorious of all beings and totally self-sufficient, He must seek His own glory for Himself first if He is ever to be for the Christian.
 - (1) *Surely, God loves His own glory; but He also loves His glorifier as they reflect Christ.*
 - (2) *And that is the key to understanding God’s love. God loves the Christian as if the Christian is Christ.*

C. Characteristics of God’s Love

1. The love of God is infinite.
 - a) Nothing can restrain it.
 - b) God’s love has immeasurable depth and is as limitless as God’s own being.
 - c) God’s love surpasses the magnitude and complexity of the finite universe.
 - d) If the universe is too great for men’s minds to fully comprehend, how much more so is His infinite love toward His children!
 - (1) *The Bible says the love that God has for us is a “great love with which He loved us,” (Eph. 2:4, ESV).*
2. God’s love is eternal.
 - a) God’s children have always been known and loved by God from eternity, even before their existence.
 - b) The Lord does not wait for a certain event to occur or for His children to respond in a certain way and use that as a condition for His love.
 - c) It is not founded on the special attractiveness of its objects, but like parental affection, on the mere fact that they are His children.
 - (1) *Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will. (Eph. 1:4-5, ESV)*
 - d) If a person is a child of God, then they can rest in the truth that God has loved them – and will love them – from all eternity without end.
 - (1) *The Lord does not just love them from a distance but desires to be close to them now and forever.*
 - (2) *Scripture tells us that the Lord delights in being with His children (John 14:23).*
3. God’s love is unchanging.

- a) It is exactly what it was before time began and will continue forever just as it is now.
- b) In fact, God's love cannot change because God Himself does not change.
- c) The unchanging nature of God's love means men can depend on it today and, with absolute certainty, for every tomorrow as well.
- d) A perfect example of God's unchanging love is found in His relationship to Abraham's grandson, Jacob.
- (1) *By all accounts, Jacob was a scoundrel.*
 - (2) *If God needed a reason not to love Jacob, He had plenty to choose from. Jacob was selfish, prideful, a deceiver, a cheat, and a liar.*
 - (3) *Yet in one of the most shocking statements in Scripture, God says, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated," (Rom. 9:14).*
 - (4) *Simply because God does not change – and His love for His people remains ever the same – "the sons of Jacob are not consumed," (Mal. 3:6).*
 - (5) *When Charles Spurgeon once preached on this text a woman came to him after the service and said, "I cannot understand why God should say that He hated Esau." "That," Spurgeon replied, "is not my difficulty, madam. My trouble is to understand how God could love Jacob."*
 - (a) *Jacob is indeed an amazing testimony to God's unshakable and unfailing love!*
 - (b) *For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:38-39, ESV)*
4. God's love knows no source other than Himself.
- a) If God's love were set upon men before they were even created, then it naturally follows that there is nothing in them as God's creatures that caused God to love them.
 - b) The reason for His love is found in God's own sovereign will and purpose alone.
 - (1) *Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of His own purpose and grace, which He gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began. (2 Tim. 1:8-9, ESV)*
5. God's love is gracious.
- a) God loves His children because He wants to.
 - b) It was love and the goodness of God that was expressed when He sent Jesus Christ into the world to pay for sin.
 - c) The Lord was not required to do anything about man's disobedience except punish sin.
 - d) But it pleased the Lord, willingly and graciously, to rescue His children from eternal judgment.
 - e) The single greatest event in the history of mankind is characterized by God's eternal and covenantal love. It is the work of Christ on the cross.
 - (1) *Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:13, NASB)*
 - f) God has not merely told men that He loves them, but He has demonstrated it by giving them His Son Jesus Christ.

(1) The Father gave up His Son, whom He loved, willingly and according to His pleasure, for those who would be adopted into His family.

(a) By this we know love, that He laid down his life for us. (1 John 3:16, ESV)

III. The Text Applied

A. God's Love is Holy

1. As wonderful as all of these qualities of God's love are, it is important for you to remember that God's love is holy.
 - a) Unlike what might pass as 'love' in our society, God's love is not capricious, nor rooted in emotional sentiment, nor indicative of some form of weakness.
 - b) Instead, we should be mindful that the Lord shows His love in holiness and purity.
 - c) This is a sobering thought, and it should not escape our attention that the Lord's love for His children includes discipline and demands righteousness (2 Tim 4:8).
 - (1) For the Lord disciplines the one He loves and chastises every son whom He receives. (Heb. 12:6, ESV)*
2. Although there are numerous Old Testament references to God's love, people often see the Old Testament as the primary demonstration of God's wrath and justice, and the New Testament as primarily representing an endless fountain of God's love washing over on everything and everyone in its path.
 - a) These images are not only inconsistent with the text of both testaments, they are also contrary to the very nature of God Himself.
 - b) We know that God loves Himself first, followed by creation.
 - c) And because the Bible is a record of God's dealings with those He created, we find abundant demonstrations of His love consistently throughout both testaments.
 - d) Multiple examples support this truth.
 - (1) God rescued His people out of Egypt because He loved them (Deut. 4:37; 7:8, 13).*
 - (2) He chose Adam, Noah, Abraham, Lot, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph because He loved them (Deut. 10:15).*
 - (3) He chose to love the people of Israel.*
 - (4) He loved His Old Testament church as those precious in His sight (Isa. 43:4).*
 - (5) When His people went through afflictions, He was afflicted with them because He loved them (Isa. 63:9).*
 - (6) His love for His people in the Old Testament is everlasting (Jer. 31:3).*
 - (7) When His people sinned against Him in their backsliding, He still loved them with an everlasting love (Hosea 14:4).*
 - (8) He loved His people so much, He rejoiced over them with joy and singing (Zeph. 3:17).*
 - (a) All this was through Jesus Christ who is, "the same yesterday, and today, and forever," (Heb. 13:8).*
3. Christ appeared to His people at various times in the Old Testament as God's special messenger to demonstrate God's condescension and love.
 - a) He appeared in visible form to show comfort and love to His people, to save them and aid them in His work on their behalf.

- b) One of the most vivid examples of this is the historical narrative of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace with one “like the Son of God” (Daniel 3:25), saving them from the fire of the king’s wrath.
 - c) In the New Testament, Christ proved His love in His self-offering (John 15:13), demonstrating God’s love to both the church in general, and individually and personally to every Christian in the New Testament.
4. God’s love is manifested through Christ.
- a) Men did not love God first. Rather, God loved His people, and sent His Son to be the atonement for their sins (1 John 4:10).
 - b) By this His elect perceive the love of God, or know what love is, because Christ laid down His life for them (John 3:16). God commends His love toward them, in that while they were yet sinners, Christ died for them (Romans 5:8).
 - c) There is no greater love than this, than Christ laid down His life for His friends (John 15:13).
 - d) Nothing shall be able to separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:35–39).
 - e) God, not sparing His Son from death, delivered Him up for them all, freely giving them all things in Christ (Romans 8:32). Christ’s death demonstrates the peculiar love of God to His people.
 - (1) *This love is not founded upon the fact that its objects are believers, for He loved them as enemies, as ungodly, and gave His Son to secure their being brought to faith, repentance, and complete restoration from their fallen image.*

B. God’s Discriminating Love

1. God’s love is freely given to some and not to others.
 - a) It is compared to the love of a husband for his wife, which by nature is exclusive.
 - b) God is under no obligation to show love, but He demonstrates it as He chooses.
 - c) In the example of Jacob and Esau, these twin boys were born to the same parents at the same time, so there was no reason to love one over the other.
 - d) This example is a solemn reminder that God’s love is not forced or coerced by anyone.
 - e) Instead, Scripture clearly teaches that God’s love is according to His own purpose and will.
 - (1) *In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will. (Eph. 1:4-5, NASB)*
2. The third chapter of John shares a conversation between Nicodemus, an inquisitive Jewish ruler, and Jesus.
 - a) Nicodemus is trying to understand the teachings of Christ regarding such things as the message of the gospel and the new birth.
 - b) What is this good news that the Son of Man came from heaven to proclaim?
 - c) It is that God did not leave men to perish in their sins, but instead has a saving eye to all kinds of people all over the world.
 - d) Here we find God’s love extending well beyond what Nicodemus thought, transcending the borders of God’s special people, Israel.
 - (1) *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)*

3. Jesus' message to Nicodemus centers around how the Father, Son, and Spirit accomplish redemption for fallen men in God's choice of those born from above (John 3:3, 5).
- a) God so loved is not a regular love. It is particular for His people; a special love, the highest love God can give.
 - b) Indeed, the apex of God's love to those who believe, manifested in many forms throughout Scripture and stretching across all of human history, is found in this promise: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," (John 3:16).
 - c) Take note of Arthur Pink's commentary on the use of the word 'world' in this verse: Does "world" mean "world?" The world does not mean the whole human family. It is used in a general way. "Show Thyself to the world" (John 7:4), did they mean "show Thyself to all mankind?" "Behold, the world is gone after Him," (John 12:19), did the Pharisees mean that "all the human family" were running after Him? When Paul wrote, "Your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world," (Romans 1:8), did he mean that the faith of the saints at Rome was the subject of conversation by every man, woman, and child on the earth? These, and many other passages show that the word "world" is often used as a relative term. It hardly ever means "the sphere called earth."
4. Finally, consider what it means to 'give' the Son for the world?
- a) It is nothing less than Christ in His incarnation, work, death, resurrection, and intercession for the believer.
 - b) God gave Christ for His intention to save His people.
 - c) John 3:16 is a special love where God so loved His people all over the face of the earth, from all time, with such an everlasting love that He gave His one and only Son to come and deliver them from His wrath and the condemnation they were under because of sin.
 - d) This unfathomable demonstration of God's love to man is cause for the believing Christian to rejoice with joy unspeakable!