



1 JOHN 4:7-16

Part 9 of Epistles of John

Pastor Mark Driscoll | 1 John 4:7-16 | September 05, 2004

If you're new, we generally go right through books of the Bible. That's kind of how we do things here. We're in 1 John this summer. We'll start Genesis here in a month. So we'll finish 1 John in September, and then, we'll launch into Genesis in October, and so tonight, we're in 1 John Chapter 4. Beginning in Verse 7, we'll go through Verse 16. So if you've got a Bible, you can go there. If not, that's okay. We'll put it on the PowerPoint and you can follow along, and the theme that we're studying tonight from this letter written by Jesus' dearest friend, a gentleman named John, is love and the love of God and that God loves us and that we can be loving people, and I know for some of you, you've heard this a million times.

It's hard to get a fresh angle on it. Bear with me. I'm gonna try and make this practical and clear for you. I think it's one of the most important things in all of Scriptures is the love of God, and we don't want to become too familiar with it because then it ceases to amaze us and to give us that wonder and awe as God intends for us. So I'll pray for our time, and then, we'll launch right in.

Lord God, we love you because you first loved us, and you've given us your love so that we can love you back and we can love one another as well. God, as we study tonight, we pray that your love would invade our hearts and our minds that we could be a loving people, that we could be people marked by your love through us to others and that the world would know that we are disciples because of the love that we share as your people, God. I pray as we study that your spirit would come and open our hearts and minds and ears and eyes to that which you'd have for us. Pray that we see you Lord Jesus and all your goodness and glory, and that through your work, we would be connected to God who is our Father as the children of God and the family of God in the place of love, the church. We give ourselves to you and we come in love in Jesus' good name. Amen.

As we get into it, our theme and our topic here is gonna be love and if you're a Bible student, in 1 John 4, it just talks about love over and over and over. It might even be good for you to go through and just circle all the occasions that love is spoken of here. It's one of the richest places in the Bible on the love of God and God's love for us and God who is love, but before I get into that, I want to back up, and I want to lay a cultural framework because when we use the word "love" in our culture, we generally don't mean the same thing that the Bible does when it uses the word "love."

In our culture, when we use the word "love," it is usually used in a way that refers to sexual love or selfish love. Sexual love meaning "I love you," which is code word for "be naked." The Bible doesn't use the word "love" like that. Guys will tell women all the time and sometimes the women will tell men, "I love you," which is just – it's a tactic. It's trick. It's not that they really love you. It's a sexual love that they're talking about, that they want to have sexual intimacy or perversion with you, but they don't really love you. They don't really love you, but we use the word "love" because we're a confused culture.

So when the Bible speaks of love, it's not a sexual love we're talking about. The Bible says that we can love each other, but it doesn't mean that we're gonna be perverse in our relationships with one another sexually. The other way that we use love in our culture is in a very selfish way, which is if you love me, I love you. If you like me, I love you. If I want you to love or like me, then I will love you, but all that is a selfish love. It's a love that loves those that are lovely. It's a love that loves those who benefit us in some way. So we're not talking about a sexual or a selfish love when we come to the Bible. What we're talking about is a supernatural and a selfless love, the kind of love that allows us to love strangers, the kind of love that actually goes even further than that and it enables us to love enemies, and when we're talking about love to define it for you, love is passion that compels you to do what is in the best interest of another person, and that way love isn't just what we think or we feel.

Love is what we do, and love always put your interests and your health above of mine, which means I may give you money. It would be better for me if I kept it, but it's better for you to have it. I may give you time or affection, but it's better for you to have it than me because I consider you more valuable than my own convenience or my own pleasure, and I'm willing to put you first as a priority in my life because I care for you, and when we're talking about love, that's what we're talking about, doing what is in the best interest of another person, not just using people for sex or selfish motives, but serving them selflessly in a supernatural way, which is love, and what this means as well is that sometimes when we're acting on a person's best interest, they may not feel necessarily loved at that moment.

The Bible says that a Father who loves his kids disciplines them. I'm sure at the time the child is saying, "Well, it doesn't feel like my Daddy loves me," but the Father in disciplining the child is doing what is in the best interest of the child because if the child is being destructive and self-destructive, the parent has to correct the child, which is an act of love. In the same way, we're reading Hebrews that God loves us and that he corrects us because he loves us. He doesn't want us to continue to destroy ourselves. So he works on us and works with us, but at first, that feels like conviction, but God does that out of love because he's seeking our best interest.

So we're talking of love. We're not talking sexual love. We're not talking selfish love. We're talking sacrificial love, supernatural love, spiritual love that enables one person to care for another even if that person should be a stranger or an enemy, even if that person should not be grateful or reciprocating because we care for them, and so the last thing I'll say is this: Part of our confusion, I believe, as a culture about love has a lot to do with the history of ideas. I don't know if you're a person who likes the history of ideas. I'm fascinated how things that are prevailing ideas in our day got to be that way because they weren't always prevailing ideas.

In our culture today, when we think of love, the first thing that most people think of is, "Well, to be a loving person, first you need to love yourself, and then, once you love yourself, you're equipped to go love other people." It's a very popular teaching today. It's not what the Bible teaches. In fact, it's completely contrary to what the Bible teaches, but the way we got there is this. There was a gentleman named Augustine, and he was a Christian. In about the 4th Century, he came up with the idea of an individual. Isn't it curious that before Augustine there really wasn't a widespread notion of us being individuals? We are identified by our family and our kin and our clan and our nation and our religion and such things.

We weren't just individuals. We were community of peoples, but Augustine writes his confessions, which is him examining his own life. So we get the concept of an individual. Another gentleman, a Christian, about 16th Century, a gentleman named Rene Descartes, he then builds on the teaching of Augustine and teaches that we're not just individuals. We're autonomous individuals and _____ "I think. Therefore, I am." I'm an individual. I have my own mind, my own thoughts, my own identity, my own life. Not only am I an individual, I'm an autonomous individual. Out of that comes another gentleman who I believe is the greatest theologian in the history of our nation, a gentleman named Jonathan Edwards, and he teaches.

He's a Christian. We're not only individuals. We're not only autonomous individuals. We're autonomous individuals who are sinners, but we can be transformed and redeemed by God's grace. So God can fix the person. Moves along a little further. Along comes another gentleman named William James. Any of you that have studied psychology you've looked at James. William James said, "You know what? Augustine's right. We're individuals. Descartes' right. We're autonomous individuals. Edwards is right. We can be improved and made better, but where they're all wrong is they keep factoring God into the equation. We can be better with psychology. We can be better with therapy. We can be better with medication and science. We can be better without God. We can fix ourselves, self-esteem, self-improvement, self-help, self-actualization."

All of this comes from James. Sort of what comes next is a gentleman named Rousseau. What he says is this: We are individuals, autonomous individuals who can get better. We don't need God. In fact, the answer is in us. This is the hallmark of American thinking. If you want to be a good person, look at the goodness in you. If you want to be a loving person, look at the love that is in you. Seek within yourself all the resources that you need to fix yourself and to make yourself into a great person, a loving person, a kind person. So all of a sudden, the trajectory of our eyes was off of God, just back into self, and the answer to all of our problems is to introspect and to look at ourselves and to know ourselves and to love ourselves and once we have healed and loved and fixed and known ourselves, then we're ready to do good works on the earth.

That's why the continual mantra, the pop culture is you can't love unless you love yourself. You can't love other people until you're in touch with your own goodness and your own love that's within you, and in the Greek text of the Bible, it calls that hogwash. That's my translation. So, you know, it's just not true. That's not what the Bible teaches at all. The Bible doesn't teach that goodness is in here. Love is in here, and if I tap this love and goodness, then I can be a loving, good person. So I want to get you out of all of that. I want you to see where these ideas come from. I want to extricate you from that cultural thinking, and I want to just come back to the pages of Scripture and say, "Well, what does the Bible say about love?"

Is it in here? Is it up there? Is it in me or is it from God? Can I fix myself or do I need God to be a transformed person? We'll look at the origin of love, the demonstration of love, and the implications of being loved, and John starts. "Dear friends" – he's no hypocrite. He loves us. "Dear friends, let us love one another." Okay, that sounds great. "For love comes from God." This is in critique of James and Rousseau. This is love is not in here. Love is in him. Love comes from God. Our goal is not to set our eyes on ourselves. Our goal is to fix our eyes on God, who is the source of love. "Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God because God is love."

Very important. Now this is the Christian refrigerator magnet verse. "God is love," right, but it's a very important verse. Some people say, "Well, of course God is love. We all know that. You wouldn't know that if it wasn't for the spread of Christianity because you won't find another religion that teaches that God is love." Islam, they pray to God. They use multiple names. None of them is love. Other religions do not teach that God is love. God is a capricious deity or the Gods are capricious deities that they're angry or mean or vengeful or spiteful, but love. That is exclusively a Christian concept. God is love, and what this doesn't say is that love is God, and I want to distinguish these two things for you. We have a propensity to define love according to culture and history of ideas and therapy and say, "Well, that's what love is."

So then when we hear that God is love, we import our definition of love onto God. Love is not God. God is love. What that means is we don't begin with the definition of love in a philosophical way. We begin with a person of God, and then, whatever God is, that's what love looks like. Okay, so God is love, and God loves and love comes from God. So you can't be a selfless supernatural spiritually loving person apart from being connected to God, and now some of you. This will raise a question. I hear this frequently. This is a common critique. The Bible says God is love. How could a loving God create hell and send people there? My point is this: Everything God does is love. Everything God does is love because God is love.

So everything he does is loving. I had a guy ask me recently. "Well, how could this loving God send people to hell?" I responded, "How could he not?" Okay, now let me do this. Let me open your frontal lobe and stir the pot a little bit. Think through this with me. Think through this with me. I'll use an analogy to help make my point. I'm a Father. Okay, you've been here any other time. You hear stories about my kids because I love being a Dad. I dig being a Dad. I'm just – I just love it, man. I love it. Now they're sick this week, and they gave me the flu. I don't love that. I lay this way. My wife lays this way. My two-year-old son keeps crawling to bed laying this way, and I get the feet in my face, and I get the little toe in my nose, and I get the heel in my armpit. I don't love that, but I love him, and I love being a Dad.

I really love being a Dad. I got a 11-month-old blond hair, blue-eyed little girl named Alexie Grace. She's just beautiful. She's about 18 pounds. She's just cute as can be. Her first word was "Dad." She fully owns me in every way. All right, she just does. She's got a big smile, four teeth. "Dada, dada, dada." I was like, "What kind of car do you want when you turn 16 because that's what you're gonna get?" So she is wonderful. Then, I've got a two-and-a-half year old son who's kind of built like me, and he's kind of like a – he's like if you put me in hot water and shrunk me down. He's like that, but blond. All right, and so he's got a little bucktooth grin. He's real affectionate, likes to cuddle, snuggle.

That's Calvin. Oh man, I love Calvin. Great kid, you know? Calvin Martin's his name, and so he's my buddy, Calvin. That's what I call him, Buddy Calvin. Whatever I'm doing, that's what he wants to do. Wherever I'm going, that's where he wants to go, and whatever I'm drinking, he has to have a sip of. Every time I've ever drank anything in my life, he wants a sip of it, and just whatever I'm doing, that's what he's into. Now his older brother is a five-year-old boy named Zachariah Blaise, blond hair, blue eyes, cute little boy, and Zachariah Blaise is my buddy. That's Buddy Zach, and Zach, he's a great kid. We play ball together. He swings a hammer. We do home improvement projects. We go to the dump together. I mean we are really tight in every masculine way, and I love this kid.

He is like one of my dearest friends. I just love hanging out with him. He's inquisitive. He's got a billion questions about God and math and money and everything, and then, the oldest is my seven-year-old daughter, Ashley. Ashley's my firstborn. She's a girly girl, love that. Every Tuesday, we go out to tea. We'll go out to eat occasionally together. She loves to cuddle with her Daddy. I got to brush her hair last night, and she is gonna be wife of the millennium because she loves the Lord Jesus Christ, baseball, and cooking. So I just – she's wonderful. I mean she's just a delight. I just thoroughly enjoy her. She's my girl. She's my daughter. Now these are my kids.

I love my kids, which means as the Father, first thing I did is I got a house so they could live there and they could play there and there could be freedom and life and joy, and they could enjoy the home and Daddy protects them and provides for them and makes an environment where they can live a wonderful life, and that's my goal for my kids is to live a great life and to be happy kids who love their Dad. Now hypothetically, some other kids move into the neighborhood. Do I love those kids? Of course I do. You should answer that. I'm your pastor. You should know me well enough to say. "We don't know." Well, golly.

Yes, I do love the other kids. The other kids _____. So let's say the other kids came over to my house to play with my kids, but I look outside, and instead of the little boy doing a home improvement project with my son who's always hammering, he took the claw hammer and whacked him in the back of the head, right, and the two – maybe there was two boys who were my oldest daughter's age and one was holding her and the other one was punching her in the stomach. They're throwing sand into the eyes of the baby and kicking her. I come out loaded gun and such and gun in one hand, King James Bible in the other, just a good old school fundamentalist from the South.

Just I come out. I tell the kids, "Look. These are my kids. I love my kids. I love you, too, but if you want to come over to play to my house, the rule is you got to obey my authority and play by my rules. You can't just come over here and do damage and devastation to my children. I love them. So here's the deal. You either need to play by my rules and respect my authority or you can't come over to my house anymore." Would that be loving?

Of course it would be, and the kids gave me the finger and whacked me with a hammer and threw sand in my eyes and said, "No, we're not gonna." Well, then the kids are leaving my house. We're locking the gate, and I'm telling them, "Look. I love you, but you're not welcome in my house, and if you don't want to respect my authority and play by my rules, I have to protect my children from you." God is loving Father. Christians are the family of God, the children of God. Heaven is God's house. Jesus says, "My Father's house has many rooms, and I'm going to prepare one for you."

If God is a loving Father who loves his kids, God loves other people as well, and God says, "You're welcome to come over to my house. You're welcome to come to heaven. You're welcome to be adopted into my family. I'll even be your Dad, but here's the rule. You got to play by my rules. I can't just let you come to my house and just ravish my kids and disrespect my authority. I love you, and if you would like to be part of our family, we welcome you, but it will be on my terms because I love my kids, and I'm not gonna set them in harm's way."

The kids who say, "No," they go to hell. That's all hell is. Hell is all the people who didn't want to obey the Father, hang out with his kids, and obey his house rules. So he says, "Well, I love you, but if that's what you want, then I'm gonna have to protect my kids from you." Some of you say, "How could a loving God do that?" How could a loving Father not? Otherwise, heaven would be hell. There would still be rape and murder and mayhem and molestation and thievery, and the children of God who are obeying the Father, loving the Father would have a right to look at the Father and say, "We thought you were a loving Father. How come you don't love us enough to protect us? How come you let heaven be hell?"

God is love. Love is not God. God loves perfectly, not as we love. God is a Father who loves us, but to experience the goodness of his love and his eternal kingdom, his household, we need to be people who come like a child to a Father saying, "I love you. I trust you. I'll play by the house rules. I'll respect your authority. I'm not gonna fight against you. I'm gonna trust that you are good and when you tell me to do something, it's good." God is love. Everything God does is loving. This doesn't mean that everything that happens is from God. There are sinful things that happen that God didn't do. He's not responsible for those. We did those.

So not everything that's done is loving, but everything God does is loving, including hell, and I would say this: The more I become a loving Father, the more I see hell as a loving place for those people who refuse to love the Father and to be part of the family. There is no choice but for them to go to that place where there isn't love. Some of you say, "Man, I can't believe God would do that." He didn't. He invites us. He invites all of us. He invites all of you. You want to have your sins forgiven? You want to be adopted into the family of God? You want to go to God's house? You want to be loved by God? You want to be protected and provided for by God? No problem. He welcomes us all. He loves us all. He invites every single one of you. He would happily adopt you as one of his kids, but you have to be willing to obey your Father.

God is love. Some of you say, "Man, okay. I get it. God is love. I got to start with God, not just my idea of love, not a sexual love, not a selfish love, but how do I know what that looks like? What does this look like practically?" He then goes on to that in the next section. "This is how God showed his love among us." God doesn't conceal his love. God's not capricious. God doesn't sit up in heaven and say, "Well, once you're a good person, I'll show you my love." God starts by showing us his love. God demonstrates his love. God showed his love among us in this way. He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. That's Jesus.

This is love. What is love? He's gonna tell us. Jesus is love. Jesus is love. We're not starting with a philosophical concept of love. We're starting with God. We're not starting with looking inside. We're starting with opening our pages of the Bible, and we're looking at Jesus. Who's Jesus? This is love, not that we love God, and this is so important, friends. Every other religion will tell you that your relationship with God begins with you. Once you're good, God loves you. Once you've done enough, God loves you. Once you've earned or merited it, God loves you. Christianity does not teach any of that. Christianity teaches that God initiates, that God loves, that God goes first, that literally God extends his hand long before we do, that God is love, and he beats us to kindness every time.

This is love, not that we love God, but that he loved us. He loved us. You are loved. You are loved. So many people run around trying to get love, trying. "I'll have sex because they said they love me." That's not Bible love. Or, "I'll allow these people to use me because they say they love me," but if they're just using you and they're not serving you, they don't love you. So many of you have been heartbroken and devastated because you're made by God to receive love, to be loved, and you're running around trying to get love and trying to be loved. I got great news. You're loved. You're already loved. You don't need to seek any further than Jesus. You're loved. You're loved, and the pop psychology is half right.

We can't love each other. We can't love others until we're loved. Well, that's true. The good news is we're loved. So now we don't need to love ourselves. We can do as Jesus says. We can love God, and we can love people. Our love needs are met. We're loved. We don't to love our self. We could do as Jesus says and deny our self, which is how we love. We do what is best for another. Just as God and Christ has loved us, we love others, and he tells us how God's loved us in Jesus. He loved us, sent his son, Jesus, as an atoning sacrifice for our sin. This is the heart of the Gospel, friends. God made us. He loved us. He made creation for us to enjoy.

Everything he formed with his mouth and his words, except for the man and the woman. The account is in Genesis that he made us with his hands. He was involved. This is love. He breathed life into us. He gave us this great planet. He told us it's not good to be alone. You need somebody to love. The whole point of life is to be in love. Some people tell you. You need water and food and shelter. The Bible tells you. As much as you need those things, you also need love because you're not a machine. You're not an animal. You're a human being. You need love. You can't live without it, can't live without love.

God loves us, but what do we do? We're foolish kids. We run away from the Father, and we run away from home. We tell God, "I don't need to obey you. I don't need to listen to you. I don't need to trust you. I don't need to believe you. I'm my own person. I can be an individual. I can be autonomous. I can be independent. I can be disconnected from you." God says, "Yeah, but I'm love, and you disconnect yourself from me. You've disconnected yourself from love, and I'm life, and you've disconnected yourself from me. You've hooked up to death." God looks down and says, "You know what? I still love them. They're rebels. They're lawbreakers. They're snot-nosed, wild, disobedient kids, but I love them. I still love them."

So God the Father devises a plan where God the Son comes into human history as Jesus Christ. Jesus then lives without sin, and he dies as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Some of the older translations use the word propitiation. This is back to the Old Testament concept of sacrifice, bloodshed for the forgiveness of sin. The point is simply this: When the Lord Jesus went to the cross, my sins were placed on him. I should die a brutal death for my sin against God. You know what? I won't because Jesus already has in my place. Jesus was punished. He suffered. He was murdered. He died. "For God so loved the world," the Bible says, "that he gave his only Son." God demonstrates his love in this. The Bible says, "While we were sinners, Jesus Christ died for us."

When Jesus died, it was because he loved me, and his final words from the cross were, "Father, forgive them." Even on the cross, Jesus was loving me right to his last breath. Friends, we are loved. We're not just loved in a sexual or a selfish way. We're loved by God, and God knew that our biggest problem was sin. Sin separates us from God. Sin separates us from each other. Sin is that which blocks love. Jesus comes. He dies for sin, and then three days later, he rises to conquer sin, and what he does, then, is he takes away the sin. Now the loving relationship with God is restored, and the loving relationship with other people is restored. The horizontal and vertical dimensions of love are reappropriated.

God loves me. I love God. God loves you. God loves me. God loves you. God allows me to love you, and the love of God flows unencumbered because Jesus has taken away the sin that blocked the flow of love. You're loved. You're loved in a way that you have never loved anyone. Do you love your enemies? No, I don't either. You want the truth? The truth is that none of us loves as God loves. The only way we come to love as God loves is as God loves us, and he changes us to be more like him. It's not something we innately possess. It's where in Romans Paul says that it's God's kindness that leads us to repentance. My paraphrase of that is that God loves us until we're different. God's got a lot of work to do. Can you imagine if somebody sinned against you grievously? A capital offense, and they deserved death, and they went to court, and you're standing before the judge, and the judge said, "You have a done a wrong. You've committed to it. You will now suffer and die, and we will execute the death penalty."

And that person looked over at you, that had committed this heinous crime, maybe killed a loved one or somebody that you deeply cared for, and you looked at them and you said, "Are you sorry?" They said, "I'm not sorry. I'd do it again today. I'd kill you if the bailiff didn't have a hold of me. What are the odds then that you would look at the judge and say, "You know what? I really love this guy. Can you kill me instead? Can I take his place? I know he killed this person I love, and I know he'd kill me if the bailiff wasn't restraining him, and I know he hates me, and I know he's my enemy, but I really love him and I want him to feel loved. Obviously, this guy has never felt love. Nobody's ever loved him. I think I'm gonna love him today. Can

you execute me instead?"

That's exactly what happened on the cross. We sin against the Father. We murder the Son. We're all guilty as charged, and God says, "I'll die in your place. I love you. You're my enemies, but I'm gonna love you until you're my friends." Guys, you are loved. You are loved in a way that you will spend the rest of your life figuring out what that means. It's that big. We are loved, not in a sexual or a selfish way, in a supernatural way, in an amazing way, in a way that you and I have a hard time wrapping our imagination around. We're loved. "You, good news. Congratulations, you're loved." Some of you didn't know that walking in here. You're thinking, "Man, I hope that I can get it together so God will love me."

I'll tell you the good news. God does love you, and that will enable you to get it together. God is love. God shows us his love in Jesus. If we want to know that we're loved, we look to Jesus. If we want to know what love looks like, we look to Jesus. Not only does God love us, he then gives us love to share. That's where he goes with his argument. "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." This is Christian love, between Christian and Christian. Christians should love each other, right? You got to love the family first. You got to love your brothers and sisters, and then, you can work on all the neighbor kids. Christians love each other.

No one has ever seen God. People get vignettes and pictures and they get shots of his glory. Paul says in I Corinthians 13, "We see in part." Nobody's ever seen God unveiled. Some people say, "I want to see God." No, you don't. You'd be like that guy at the end of, you know, Raiders of the Lost Ark who just melted away. It wouldn't be good. That's like saying, "Well, I won't believe in the sun until I stand on it." Well, you won't believe in it then either because you're gone. You're done." The holy, righteous God, if he unveiled himself, we're just done. So he veils himself. That's why even when Jesus came, Philipians 2 says that he laid aside some of his glory so that we could gaze upon him. No one has ever seen God.

You say, "Well, man, I wish I could see God." Well, there is another way you can see God, not directly, but you could see it through the effects that he's worked in history. No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. Some of you say, "How do I know God loves me? I can't see him." Well, see the people that he sent to love you. See the people who love you, and you will see that God is loving you through them. Where does love come from? God. If you are loved, who is ultimately responsible for that love? God.

He's just dispensing it through the people that he's put in your life. This also is a great privilege. It means that you and I get to be people of love. We get to love people. There are people all over that don't know God that wish they could see him, and if we show up and love them, they'll catch a glimpse, and in that way, he says that God's love is completed. Now this is so important because on the cross, God loved us, but God's love isn't just a one-time occurrence 2,000 years ago. God's love is an ongoing present active work in the earth. Do you know that God is still loving? Did you know that God is still loving people, and he's loving people through his people?

He's sending his kids out to love one another, and then, to go love the rest of creation, to love the rest of humanity. That's where he goes in the next section of verses. "God is love. God shows us his love, gives us his love in Jesus. God gives us his love so that we can complete his love by loving one another as Christians as the church, and then, also going outside of the church into the world and loving people there, too." That's the next section. We know that we live in him and he in us because he has given us Holy Spirit, and we have seen and testified that the Father sent his Son to be the savior of the world. There's two things I want to hit here. One is that Christians get a bad rap.

Some people say, "Christians are not loving. They're all hypocrites." Well, they're not all hypocrites. Some are, but not everybody who says they're a Christian. In the history of the world, some of you will think, "Well, I know Christians that have done terrible things." Well, I'm not sure that they are Christians because he keeps telling us real Christians love. So to say, "Well, I know all these Christians who don't love," well, maybe they're not real Christians. Maybe they're like Judas Iscariot, the person who gets on the team, but they're an evildoer, and they're sent by Satan, and they're a counterfeit to trick you, but let me ask you this.

If you extricated the love of Christians from human history, would the world be a different place? The one guy who's red in the back laughs because he knows where I'm going, and he's right. If you extricate the love of God's people from human history, we don't go eat chicken tonight. We eat each other, okay? The world is different if you extricate the love of God's people. I think Christians unnecessarily get a bad rap. They say, "Well, Christians don't love." Well, I'll tell you what. Take all our good works and stack them up against the atheists and stack it up against the Buddhists and stack it up against the Hindus, and we'll see.

You ever been to a country that believes in karma? It's not a loving place. They say in your past life, you did something bad. So if you suffer in this life, God is paying you back. He's whacking you around, and I don't want to help you because then I would be interrupting your karma. So there aren't hospitals. There aren't charities. There aren't orphanages. There aren't, until the Christians get there. I've been to India, open sewers, throw away kids, absolute sadness. Then, there's my buddy, he lives in India, comes to meet the Lord Jesus, starts an orphanage, takes in 100 kids off the streets, all throwaways. They would have been sold off into prostitution and slavery. Yes, the little kids with the big eyes, and they love Jesus, and they're just cute as can be.

If you're a Christian, they call you Uncle or Auntie because they believe all Christians are family. One of the most convicting things in my whole life was just being called Uncle by these little kids. I say, "So why are you here?" The answer through the translator from the little boy, "God loves me, and he loves me through ____." That's what he tells me. A little boy gets it. God loves me. He sent ____ here to love. Orphanages, hospitals, charities, social service comes out of the spread of the Gospel. It just does. I don't buy all this critique against Christians. I just don't. Did you know that in the time that this New Testament was written, that Rome was filled with slavery? One-half of all Roman citizens were slaves. The great Greek culture and its shining city of Athens, where we just had the Olympic Games, two-thirds of all citizens were slaves. Why?

Because people didn't love. Children were thrown out on the trash heap for the garbage collector, particularly the girls, and they would be taken into prostitution if they were girls and taken into slavery if they were boys. That wasn't love. There are still places in the world that people will take their own children and throw them in the river trying to appease the angry God ____ concept that there is a loving God. Did you know that the first 123 colleges and universities in the United States of America were almost without exception founded by Christians who loved people enough that they wanted them to learn how to read and get a good education to take care of their family?

Do you know that the printing press was invented by a Christian because he loved us enough that he wanted us to be able to read, and the first book he printed was the Bible? Did you know that for the first 100 years of our nation's history, all the schools were Christian? There wasn't such a thing as public education because the Christians were the only ones that loved people enough to want them to be literate. Today, the vast majority of hospitals, which started out as Christian alms houses, are Catholic, Presbyterian, Protestant. Even their names will bear into the fact that they are Christian in origin. Did you know that the YMCA is the Young Man's Christian Association? The YWCA was the Young Women's Christian Association.

Did you know that the Red Cross was founded by a Christian who wanted to love his enemies even in times of war and genocide, and he was given the Nobel Prize in his attempt to love, particularly those who are hurting the most? I guess my point is simply this, friends. God's people have been loving. Now we are not a perfect people, but love has changed the world, and if you extricate our love, this is not the same world. We argue over which politician to vote for. It wasn't for Christianity, we would have rule of man, not rule of law. We wouldn't even have an election. We wouldn't argue over anything. We would just do what the dictator said because he has a gun to our head. We believe in love, and it works itself out, and now we are in a culture that is on the vestige of sort of the last gasp of the fruit of some Biblical thinking. I'm not saying we're a Christian country, but people walk around saying, "You know, women walk around, "Well, Christianity is not loving to women."

The only reason you can say that is because you got to go to college and take your veil off and no longer be property of your husband like a cow. If it wasn't for Christianity, you would have a veil on. You would be property of your husband. You wouldn't be educated. So you couldn't complain about how Christians have liberated you, right? We live in this weird world. God's people have loved. Everybody reaps the benefits, and then says, "Well, they're not loving people." We are loving people, and everywhere that Christianity spreads, charitable giving spreads. The old Bible translators would translate as charity, which I really like because love seems like an emotion, but charity is an act, which is what love is, and do you know that if you want to see charitable giving, you got to go to those places that are most Christian?

I'll tell you a little secret in Seattle. I met with a reporter today. She says, "Do you have political leanings?" She said, "Do you have political aspirations?" I said, "No, but I have a lot of political opinions. I don't have any political aspirations, but I have a lot of political opinions because, to me, what we're talking about is God's people providing love for people who don't know him yet." In this city, it's really weird because you would get this impression that we're this sort of very generous giving, kind, benevolent just writing checks for all the causes kind of people. Again, hogwash. We're just not. Statistically, Seattle is one of the least churched and the least charitable cities in the United States of America. Did you know that? We have all these, "Oh, we're for this. We're for this. We're for that." We're not writing any checks. We're not people that are doing anything because we don't understand love.

So we love those who benefit us. We love those who bless us. We don't love strangers. We don't love enemies. So what we do as a city is we tax one another heavily because we know that love won't get anything done because there isn't any love so we need to take the money out of your pocket because you wouldn't just give it freely out of love. "Oh, there's a single mother in lead. I'll help her with her groceries. No, I won't." The government comes along and says, "Well, yes, you will." There you go. You did it. As the church, friends, here's our great deal. We should just love. We should just love freely as God's loved us. Say, "Well, they're mean." Well, love them until they're nice. "Well, they don't deserve it." We didn't deserve it. You know, we're all jerks, too.

Christians who understand that we're all sinners unmerited of love have the great opportunity just to go love everybody, be a loving people, be agents of love, and Jesus says that by that, all men will know that we are his disciples if we're loving people. Now let me tell you where this love comes from. This is a huge theological category. No, back. I'm warming up. Okay, we know that we live in him. That's God, the Father, and he in us because he has given us of his Spirit. That's the Holy Spirit, and there it is. The Father, you see Verse 14? The Father and the Son. So Verse 13, the Spirit. Verse 14, the Father. Verse 14, the Son. The Father, Son, and Spirit. I'll tell you another thing on love. This is – to me, this was revolutionary when I understood this as a new Christian. Religions who believe in one God or believe in many Gods still don't believe in a loving God.

Okay, those who believe in one God – Islam or Judaism – they will teach that God made us because he was lonely. God didn't have anybody to love. God didn't have anybody to love him. So God said, "I want a relationship. I got to make somebody," and so God made us. Christianity doesn't teach that at all. The religions who believe in multiple Gods, some of the Gods are good, bad, capricious, not love. Here's where love comes from. Our view of God, the Biblical view of God, is concept of the Trinity. It's not that there are many Gods or just one God, that there is one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit. Christian's concept of God is utterly unique. One theologian said, "If you deny it, you lose your salvation. If you try to understand it, you lose your mind."

Okay, which some of you say, "Well, I can't believe in a God I can't understand." I can't believe in a God I do because I can't program my VCR. I can't tune up my own truck. Like if I was like God, if I had him wired, I'd be very unimpressed because it doesn't take much to stump this band, right? So what we're talking about is one God, three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, eternally existing together. That's why the Son was sent into history, wasn't created. He was sent into history. He's been eternally existent, John says. So where does love come from? God. Do you know that the Father, Son, and Spirit were in perfect, loving relationship of community before anything in creation was made by them? Do you know what precedes matter?

Do you know what precedes creation? Do you know what precedes the earth? Do you know what precedes human life? Love. Love precedes all. God

the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit, love, love. It's where Jesus says in John's Gospel, "Father, love them with the love that you and I have shared since before the beginning." God is love, and the Trinitarian God is the source of love. We're made in God's image and likeness to love. Love is what we're built to do. It's what we're made to do. We're built to receive love and to give love, and its sin that gets in the way, but God the Father through God the Son by God the Spirit takes it away. So now we can receive God's love, and then, God doesn't just leave us.

He places the Holy Spirit in us. It's what he's saying here. He has given us of his Spirit. It's the Holy Spirit that dwells in the child of God, and it is the Spirit of God who brings the love of God according to Romans 5, that God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Spirit that he's given us. So the eternal love between the Father, Son, and Spirit is given to us through the Lord Jesus, and it is kept in us by God the Holy Spirit. So now we don't run out of love. We love when we don't feel loving. We love strangers. We love enemies. We love those who harm us. We love those who do us evil. Why?

Because it's a supernatural miracle. It's something that only God could do if he were working through us in spite of ourselves. We're reconnected by God the Spirit through God the Son to God the Father and sharing in their love. This is miraculous. This is totally different than sexual and selfish love. This is antithetical and completely other to that. When the Bible says that God is love, it's unbelievable, and when he says that he loves you, it's unbelievable. So many people, this is just what kills me. So many people just don't know it. They just don't know it. That's why it's so important for you and I to be loving so that they'll see it, so that they'll know that they're loved. John closes with this great final statement. "If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God."

You say, "Man, I want to be loved by God. I want to love God. I want to love other people with God's love. Where do I start?" Where do you start? Jesus. If you're here for any duration of time, the answer to any question ultimately is Jesus. How do you get on I-5? Well, Jesus. I mean that's the answer to all our questions ultimately. Jesus is where we start. Jesus is where we start because if anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, what this means is that Jesus is God and man, his humanity and divinity. Jesus is God. Jesus is God, the eternal God who became a man. He did this to bring God to us and to bring us to God, to be back into this flow of love. To be connected back to this relationship of love, we need to be connected to Jesus.

See there's a lot of religious teachers, but they're not God. So they can't connect you to God. Only God can connect you to God, and then, there's God, but we're human beings and we're sinful and we're separated from God by virtue of our sin. So we need to be reconnected to God so God becomes a man. Jesus is the only one who can connect human beings to God because it was God who became a human being, and he says, "Anyone who acknowledges that, anyone who receives that, anyone who accepts that, anyone who embraces that Jesus is God who became a man, he lived without sin. He dies for sin. He rose, and he loved me, and if I give him my sin, he will give me love, and I'll be reconnected to the love of God and God will take up residence in me, and he will mold me and shape me to be a loving person like Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.

That is how we get connected to love. It's Jesus. I don't want you to walk out of here going, "Okay, the point of the sermon is I need to be loving." Well, the point of the sermon is you need to be connected to Jesus, and if you're connected to Jesus, you will love. You will love. You can't help yourself because God is love. Once you're connected to God and you're loved by God, you will love with God's love. It is who you become, and he closes with this great statement, and so we know and we rely on the love that God has for us. Friends, do you know this? Walking in here tonight, I'm assuming all of you have heard "God loves you" to the point where it's almost meaningless. It's almost hollow and empty.

"Yeah, I know he loves me." Do you know that? Do you know that the eternal God who is love loves you? Not just with sentiment or speech, but he loves you with actions. He came to earth to save you. He died in your place as the atoning sacrifice for your sins. He takes away sin so that you can be loved and you can be loving. Do you know that you're loved by God? Some of you, you sin, and you don't know this, and so you don't rely on it. You fall into depression and guilt and shame or if you're sinned against, you fall into anger and bitterness and frustration. Do you know this? Do you know that Jesus takes away sin and do you know that Jesus will enable you to love people in the way that he has loved you? Do you know that?

And I'm not talking about this theological knowledge. That's very important. I'm talking about this experiential knowledge. When you sin, do you know that God still loves you? When you sin, do you know that God's love took away your sin at the cross and that when Jesus died, he took away your sin out of love? When you sin, you don't need to kill yourself and beat yourself up, and when someone sins against you, you don't need to kill them and beat them up. Love covers a multitude of sins, and it has. You are loved. Do you know that? Do you know that God's love is freely given? You don't need to be good. You don't need to work hard. You don't need to be religious. You need to be loved. Do you know that and are you relying on that?

Are you leaning on that? When you sin, is that what you're leaning on? When others sin against you, is that what you're leaning on? Are you relying on this truth as the way you live your life? I'll tell you what, guys. Love is winning. I don't know if I ever would have said this before. Love is winning. We started this church 8 years ago with 12 people in my living room. It's a great holiday weekend. The sun's out. The bands are playing. It's the last holiday. Look around the room. Love is winning. Love is winning. A handful of people love some people. Those people encounter God's love, and they became loving people, and they loved other people. Next thing you know, there's a few thousand of us.

Are you relying on this? Do you know that this works? Do you know that there is a world out there filled with people who God loves and he's gonna send you from this place to go love them? You're gonna fill every cubicle, every dorm room, every cul-de-sac with God's love. You're gonna bring the love of God with you to your stranger's, to your neighbor's, to your enemy's, and first and foremost to your brothers and sisters and your family and friends. You start closest to home and you work out from there, and guys, I promise you this. Love wins in the end. It's not sin that wins. It's not death that wins. It's not folly that wins. It's not Satan that wins.

Love wins in the end. The God I believe in Seattle is a great Father who is in the process of amassing an enormous spiritual family, taking all these little

kids that are just rebellious little orphans running around, just disobeying definitely the Father, and that he is sending us out to love them saying, "You know what? I am no better than you. I'm not here to judge you. I'm not here to condemn you. I'm here to love you. I was loved by a person whom God loved. He sent them to me to love me. They changed my life by love. I am now just giving to you what I have received, and that's the love of God." You are an agent of God's love on the earth. You're an object of God's love on the earth.

Love wins in the end. Love wins in the end, and my invitation to you is to be connected to the Father through the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit, tapping in to God's love so that you can be loved, so that you can love God, so that you can love others. They will know this and you will rely on it, that this will be your Plan A for the rest of your life. You will have no Plan B. That in faith, you will leave here receiving God's love, and then, sharing it freely with others. Gosh, it's so cool for me because you know what? I don't think when I started this church that I was really thinking about loving a lot of people. I think over the course of the last few years, that God has changed my heart to where I can honestly tell you no manipulation. I really do love you. I really do love this church. I really do love the people in this church.

I love what God is doing in the lives of people in this church, and I love the fact that God's love goes from people to other people to other people to other people to other people and that love is winning. I love to see that. Tonight, I invite you to the Lord Jesus. First things first, be loved. Give him your sin. Receive his love. If you already have, be grateful. Be thankful. You're loved. You're loved. We'll partake of communion, which is remembering Jesus' body and blood. We're remembering his atoning sacrifice for our sins. Remember Jesus. We give of our tithes and offerings because love isn't just what we think and what we feel.

It's what we do. If you're not a Christian, you're a visitor. Don't give. It's our pleasure to have you, and then, we're gonna sing and we're gonna celebrate and we're gonna rejoice because love is winning. I look around. It's winning right here tonight. God's love is changing people. God's love is coming through people. God's love is working it's way out through the city that we're in, and when it's all said and done, nothing will be the same because love preceded sin. Love will exist after sin is no more, and in the middle, it is love that triumphs. You're loved. Congratulations.

Father God, we love you because you first loved us. What a great statement. You reached your hand out first. You embraced us first. You pursued us first. God, thanks for starting. Thanks for initiating. Thanks for pursuing us. Thanks for loving us. God, thank you for loving us so much to do what is in our best interests, not just your own. God, it is not in your best interest to die. It is not in your best interest to suffer. It is not in your best interest to give of yourself, humbly, repeatedly, year after year, but God, it is in our best interest for you to be that way to do those things. God, thank you for loving us, not in a selfish way where you're using us, not in a perverted and sexual way like so many cults and false religions, but God, in a supernatural way, in a special way, in a holy way, in a sacred way.

Where for reasons that are a complete mystery to us, you just adore us. You love us until we become lovely. God, I pray that none of us would walk out of here in arrogance, seeking to be an individual, that instead, we would be the church and not seeking to find answers in ourselves, but trying to seek, instead, answers in Christ. God, I pray we would stop looking for love, but instead, we would know that it has found us, that we would extend our hands and surrender and that we would embrace you, Lord God, who has embraced us first. God, we thank you that you're a Father, that you're building this great family, that you have a place prepared for each of your kids, and that you love us enough to protect us from harm.

God, we give ourselves to you. We sing and celebrate in your honor until we see you face to face, and until we do, Lord God, we pray that your love would be made complete among us, that until we see you face to face, we would see you in the eyes. We would hear you in the voices, and we would feel you in the hands of those people that you've surrounded us with to love us and for us to love. You're a great God. We receive your love in Jesus' good name. Amen.