

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today's service and this sermon are all about love. Love is a topic you hear about almost every day of your life. Countless songs have been written about love. We use the word love in our everyday language. Perhaps already today, you've told someone that you love them. Or maybe you've expressed your love for something. Like ice cream, or warm spring days. In every religion of the world, you will hear about love. Atheists also talk about love. And, of course, we Christians talk a lot about love too. Love is here. Love is there. We find love everywhere! Or do we?

Dear friends, listen to God's Word as it is recorded by the apostle John in his first epistle. Here, our dear Father in heaven invites us to "Live in love." From this text, God teaches us what love is. He shows us what the blessings of true love are. And he also shows us how to properly express love. I think you will see that God's idea of love differs significantly from the world's view of love. We read 1 John 4:16-21.

16 We know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. 17 In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. 18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

19 We love because he first loved us. 20 If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. 21 And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

If we are going to follow the direction of our God to "live in love", we must first of all have a good understand of what this "love" is that we're supposed to remain in! Have you noticed that some things are much easier to define by seeing or experiencing rather than by explaining? "Love" is one of those things that can only be defined and understood by seeing it and by experiencing it. And the way we see and experience love first and foremost is in God.

"God is love" (v.16) John tells us. "Love comes from God" (7). To know God is to know love. There's no way around it... if you want to understand love, you must know and understand something about God. The person that is ignorant of God is necessarily ignorant about love.

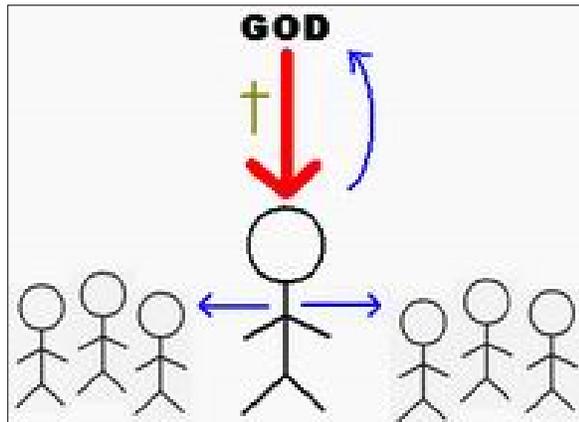
So few people in this world learn about love from the source. Instead they learn about love from imperfect humans, and from TV, movies songs and books. But God tells us very clearly, if a person doesn't know God he or she is not capable of knowing what real love is! Know God. Know love.

What is love as **God** has revealed it? God's kind of love is such that it gives generously to all, even though they don't deserve. This is God's definition of love: Love is giving generously to others even though they haven't earned or deserved it. Memorize that definition! When the world speaks of love, it talks of emotions, feelings and good wishes. When we say, "God loves us." We're saying, God gives us all good things even though we have sinned against him and only deserve punishment. John 3:16 describes God's love, "*For God so loved the world*

that he **GAVE** his one and only Son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.” Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates his own **love** for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” While we were still sinners, God gave the greatest gift imaginable... his one and only Son. To rebellious, sinful people, God gives forgiveness, life and salvation. And earlier in 1 John 4, we read: “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 Jn 4:9-10).

And so our text begins, “We know and rely on the love God has for us.” The key to showing love for others is first of all knowing God’s love for us, and trusting in it. Now we better understand John’s words: “Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him..” The only way to be with God and in God is to live in “love.” Does this mean we need to live in God’s love... always remembering and trusting in his love for us? Or does “live in love” mean to always be showing love for others? It seems the apostle John has both types of love in mind! The two are inseparable. We can’t love others without knowing God’s love for us. And if we’re not showing love for others, that means we don’t fully know or believe in God’s love for us! Unless we have both, we are not living in love. God’s love for us and our love for others are inseparable!

Christian love, as John is describing it looks like this: God gives generously and freely to us even though we don’t deserve it. In response we give generously and freely to God – who certainly **does** deserve it. Also in response to his love, we give generously and freely to everyone around us, even though they often don’t deserve it. If there is a break in any of these “lines of love”, then the whole system falls apart. If I don’t know or believe God’s love for me in Christ, I can’t truly love him or others. If I don’t show love for others, I don’t truly trust God’s love, nor do I show love for him.



And so, dear friend, “Live in love!” John describes the benefits of this kind of love. First of all, he says this kind of love is perfect. It is whole and complete. It lacks nothing. Isn’t a perfect love something you’ve sought all of your life? Who doesn’t want perfect love? God gives us the formula [key] for having perfect love in us... in our families... in our church. Live in this kind of love (as just described above) and you have perfect love!

Another blessing for us with this kind of love is that “we will have confidence on the day of judgment,” When we have fellowship with God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ... when we remain in the Son and in the Father... when God lives in us and we in him... then we have confidence that we will not be condemned on judgment day. We don’t have to live our lives wondering if we’ll be in heaven or hell. We don’t have to worry if God will be smiling or frowning at us in the judgment. We have confidence **right now** regarding our standing [status] with God. We know where we’ll be for all eternity, because we are “living in love”. This confidence is ours “because in this world we are like him.” As Christ showed his love in this world, so also we show love to one another. We imitate Christ for we know his love and live in his love.

John describes one more benefit of this love. “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in

love.” If I were to ask you, “what is the opposite of love”, you’d probably answer “hate.” Or if I asked, “what is the opposite of fear”, you might answer, “secure” or “confident”. But in this text, John calls “fear” and “love” opposites. Just as faith and doubt cannot exist together in our heart, so also love and fear cannot exist in us at the same time. *‘But perfect love drives out fear.’*

What does John mean by “perfect love”? Of course, any love we produce can never be perfect. John is talking about the love relationship God forms with us. When we have Christ’s perfect love in us and express his perfect love in our lives, then fear is driven out of us. Fear has to do with punishment. When one of my children does something wrong, they are afraid that I will find out. They fear punishment when they do wrong. We also will fear God when there is a lack of love. Feelings of guilt and remorse will fill the hearts of all those who have refused to obey God’s commands, to believe his Word and trust in the Savior, Jesus Christ. Their hearts will be filled with fear, for they know the Judge will punish them because of their sin. But those who live in love with the Father and the Son have nothing to fear. Their hearts are filled with joy and love, for they will hear the word “acquitted” from the mouth of Jesus. Jesus will defend them and say to the Father, “I have paid for their sins!”

The apostle John has described for us what love is. He has shown us the blessings which are ours when we live in love. John also shows us how to express this love in our lives. The world in which we live has a twisted view of how love should be expressed. To the world, love is an inward emotion that seeks self-gratification... love is something that is merely felt. The world also sees love as something that must be earned and deserved. John tells us that Christians who know God’s love will love one another. He says, *‘If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.’*

John speaks in very direct, hard words. If you claim you love God, but you don’t love people, you’re a liar. If a person goes to church every week, and reads his Bible and prays to God every day, but he fails to show love to his neighbor, that person is a liar. He doesn’t really love God. He’s a hypocrite. If you think about it, this makes perfect sense. If a person really knows what a sinner he is before God... if he really knows how unworthy he is of God’s love... if he really knows the great love God showed when he sent Jesus as a sacrifice for his sin... is it really possible for such a person to **not** show love for his neighbor? If you know the mountain of sin God has forgiven you, is it possible you can’t forgive your neighbor’s ant hill of sin?

If you know and believe that God has given you undeserved love and goodness, then you will also naturally show that same undeserved love and goodness to others. If you don’t believe you owe this kind of love to others, then God calls you a liar when you claim to trust him and his love!

These are hard words we hear, aren’t they? Do you know and believe God’s love for you? Do you believe that God’s love for you led him to determined action – to give self-sacrificially to bring you good? He sent his Son to die for you! If you know and believe, then God says, “Show that exact same type of love for your brother.” That means more than just having a warm feeling of good will for our neighbor. It means giving yourself generously to others – even those who haven’t earned or deserved it. It means expressing your love, and taking action. (Not sitting home thinking good thoughts.)

So you understand what I mean, here are some examples of **false** love. In other words, the following examples are the kind of “love” **God doesn’t** approve of -- a love which isn’t really love.

- Someone says, “I forgive him. But I’m still really mad at him because he offended me.” This isn’t real love.
- Or: “I love *so and so*, but I won’t speak to him until he apologizes for what he did.” This also is not real love.
- Or: “I’m right and she’s wrong. Why should I go and talk to her?” Love doesn’t insist on being right. Love will take action to restore a broken relationship.
- Or: “I know I could probably give more, but I have to think about my own family.” Real love gives generously.
- Or: “Who’s that strange person in church today? He better not sit in my spot!”

Now, let me give you some examples of the kind of love **God** does want us to show.

- “I forgive him, so I will put away my anger and show kindness to him.”
- “Whether this person apologizes or not, I will do good to him, just as Jesus did good for me although I was a sinner.”
- “*So and so* sinned against me, so I’ll go and talk to her in love about this problem we have. I love her and don’t want this problem to come between us.”
- “I will give generously, because that’s how God gave to me.”
- “A new person came to church today! I’ll go to talk to him. Perhaps my friendliness will encourage him to learn more about Jesus.”

You see, Christ’s love moves us to show love for others – not just in words, feelings or emotions... but also in action. Truly: Whoever loves God must also love his neighbor.

Dear friends, live in love! Constantly be renewed in you faith and knowledge of God’s love for you. Know that God will bless you richly through his complete and perfect love. Express his love every day by loving your neighbor as yourself. In this way our great and glorious God will receive honor and glory. We will be at peace with God and our neighbor. God’s ~~will~~ will be done among us. His church will grow and prosper. More and more people will come to faith in the Son of God, and our fellow believers will be built up in their faith in Jesus Christ. *Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.*” Amen.

And the peace of God which transcends all human understanding will guard and keep your hearts and your minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.