

<sup>7</sup> *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.* <sup>8</sup> *Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.* <sup>9</sup> *In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.* <sup>10</sup> *In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.* <sup>11</sup> *Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.* <sup>12</sup> *No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.*

<sup>13</sup> *By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.* <sup>14</sup> *And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.* <sup>15</sup> *Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.* <sup>16</sup> *So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.* <sup>17</sup> *By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world.* <sup>18</sup> *There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.* <sup>19</sup> *We love because he first loved us.* <sup>20</sup> *If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.* <sup>21</sup> *And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.*

Thomas A Kempis gave us this definition of love: “Nothing is sweeter than love, nothing stronger, nothing higher, nothing wider, nothing more pleasant, nothing fuller or better in heaven or on earth... Love often knows no limits but is fervent beyond measure. Love feels no burdens, thinks nothing of labors, attempts what is above its strength, pleads no excuse of impossibility... Though wearied, it is not tired; though pressed, it is not straightened; though alarmed, it is not confounded; but as a lively flame and burning torch, it forces its way upwards and passes securely through all.”

What a wonderful and excellent description of love. As we continue to think about great churches and great church members, I want to think about a loving church and loving church members. A great church is a loving church, and a loving church is the result of its members being loving members.

One of the marks of the early church is the way they loved each other and those around them. In a letter to Diognetus, written by an unknown writer around 130 A.D., it was said of early Christians: “They love all men, but are persecuted by all.” Tertullian, an early church leader reported that the Romans would exclaim, “See how they love one another.” Justin Martyr gave this sketch of the way the early church loved: “We who used to value the acquisition of wealth and possession more than anything else, now bring what we have into a common fund and share it with anyone who needs it. We used to hate and destroy one another and refused to associate with people of another race or country. Now, because of Christ, we live together with such people and pray for our enemies.”

It is no wonder that Christianity spread so quickly throughout the ancient world. The kind of love they showed to each other and those around captured the attention of the world. If we are to capture something of the early church we must love as they loved.

John had much to say about love. If you were to take the little book of 1 John and underscore each time you find the word “love” in the book, you will find that it is a dominant

theme. The nickname of the Apostle John was the “apostle of love.” How he loved and what he felt about love is very clear in the book. John tells us to “*love one another*” (1 John 4:7). Let’s look at the love he describes and how we are to love one another. First, think with me how John speaks of a:

### **1. Love That Is Unnatural**

When I speak of an unnatural love, I am referring to a kind of love that runs contrary to how we love naturally. Or to say it another way, it is a love that is quite different than how we love according to our human nature. Natural love is often based on attraction. There was something that attracted every husband and wife. Maybe it was her big brown or deep blue eyes. Maybe it was his bulging muscles and shiny sports car. In either case there was something that attracted us to our mate, an attraction that developed into love.

Now, it could be a case like the woman who went to the police station to file a missing report on her husband. The police officer asked her for a description. She said, “Well, he is fat, bald-headed, never shaves, dresses real sloppy,” and then she paused. After a moment she said, “On second thought, let’s forget about the missing report.”

Sometimes our love is reciprocal. We love someone because of how they have treated us or what they have done for us. Our love and how we feel about others is largely motivated by how they have treated us.

Natural love finds it hard to love those who mistreat us. If someone is attacking you and hurting you, it is not easy to love them. I must be honest and say that there are some people who are hard to love. Yes, there are those you can’t help but love, but some people are hard to like and love. Natural love finds it hard to love at certain times.

However, John is describing a kind of love that is more than a natural love. He is describing a supernatural love. It is a kind of love that loves even those who mistreat us. Jesus said in Matthew 5:44, “*Love your enemies.*” Love that is according to human nature finds it hard to love our enemies. However, John is describing a kind of love that enables us to love even our enemies.

Let me say two things about this kind of love. First, let me call it:

#### **A) An Eternal Love**

In 1 John 4:7 the Bible says, “*For love is from God.*” John is speaking of a kind of love that originates with God. This is a love that finds its source in God. The kind of love that John tells us that God gives. The Bible says in Roman 5:5, “*Because God’s love has been poured into our hearts.*” Yes, there are people and times when I have a hard time loving, but the God of love can enable me to love as Christ Jesus did.

I think of Corrie ten Boom. She and her family helped hide Jewish people from the Nazis. But then they were discovered and sent to a German prison. She never saw her father again. She and her sister Betsy ended up at the Ravensbruck Concentration Camp. Betsy would languish and die there and it was only a miracle that Corrie survived and was released. After the war, Corrie was speaking in a church in Munich when she saw one of the S.S. guards from Ravensbruck. Suddenly it was all there; the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsy’s pain-blanching face.

After the service he walked up to her with an outstretched hand. He told her of how he had been saved. However, Corrie’s hand stayed by her side. She couldn’t raise it to take the hand of the man before her. As she stood there, her soul fighting a battle within, she prayed,

“Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me your forgiveness.” She finally reached up and took his hand. She said, “From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love that almost overwhelmed me.” She later said of the incident, “When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love.”

That is what John is talking about. Love is of God and the love we are to show others is a love that comes from God. It is the kind of love that will enable us to love when otherwise we could not love. It is a love that has an eternal source rather than a natural.

Also, John tells us that this love is:

## B) An Evidential Love

This love not only comes from God, but it is also evidence that we know the God of love. John says, “*Whoever loves has been born of God, and knows God.*” John not only has much to say about love, but he also says much about the evidence of those who are truly saved. It has been said that the Gospel of John was written that we might know how to be saved and 1 John was written that we might know we are saved.

We read in 1 John 3:14, “*We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.*” Also, in 1 John 4:12, the Bible says, “*No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.*” The Bible could not be plainer.

The Bible tells us in 2 Corinthians 13:5, “*Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!*” We are to put our profession to the test.

Salvation is like having the chicken pox. If you have it, it will pop out on you. There will be the evidence of salvation, and John tells us that one mark of being saved is the love that we have for others.

Again, I remind you that John is talking about a supernatural kind of love, not a natural. One can only have this supernatural kind of love if they are saved. Secondly, John not only describes this love as an unnatural, but it is also a:

## 2. Love That Is Unselfish

Notice with me 1 John 3:16-18: “*By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.*” John describes a demonstration of love and how we are to love others.

Notice the words, “*By this we know love...*” Albert Barnes states that this statement declares, “By this we know love, that is, we know what true love is.” In Christ we see what true love is. If we really want to see love, look at Christ and the love He has shown to us.

His love is seen in that, “*He laid down His life for us.*” What a selfless expression of love we have in Christ. He willingly gave His life for us. Real love is always a selfless love. In the great love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, we are told that love “*does not insist on its own way*” (1 Cor. 13:5). Real love does not have self at the center of its actions and expressions.

I think about a girl who wrote a boy she had once been engaged to. She wrote: “Dear Jimmy; No words could express the great unhappiness I’ve felt since breaking our engagement. Please say you will take me back. No one could ever take your place in my heart, so please

forgive me. I love, I love you, I love you. Yours forever, Marie.” Then there was a P.S., “And congratulations on winning the lottery.”

There is nothing selfish in the love that John describes. It is thoughtless of self and empty of any selfish motive. In Ernest Gordon’s *Bridge on the River Kwai*, he tells about a group of Scottish soldiers that had been captured by the Japanese and forced to work on a jungle railroad. There is one scene in which he describes an act of unselfish love. A shovel was discovered missing. The Japanese commander was enraged and ordered the shovel to be produced or else.

When no one stepped forward he pulled out his gun and began threatening to kill every man until someone confessed to taking the shovel. Finally one man stepped forward. The commander took a shovel and beat him to death. Later at a recount of the shovels it was discovered that a mistake had earlier made and all the shovels were there. Word spread like fire throughout the camp of one who had been willing to give his life to save others. That is unselfish love.

As we look closer at this unselfish love we see:

#### A) The Eyes of Love That Sees

Notice the words “*sees his brother in need*” in 1 John 3:17. The word “*sees*” speaks of being a spectator. Here is someone who looks upon another and sees them through eyes of love. John tells us that love has eyes. Love looks at people with interest, thoughtfulness, and compassion. Love sees more than a person. It sees a brother.

This kind of love makes us blind to race, color, status, how one lives, where they live, what they are or what they do. This God-given love makes us see others as Christ sees them. This kind of love does not look upon others with criticism, judgment, hatred, and scorn. Instead, we look upon them with love.

Love can penetrate steel doors of racism and prejudice. Love can break through hearts that are filled with hatred and distrust. There is no greater human force in the world than love. It is a powerful tool in reaching others.

Ken Trivette tells the story: “I saw Buck often as I was growing up. I would see him around town from time. He was different. He always wore a pair of bib overalls. He was always unshaven and dirty. He walked slumped over. He couldn’t talk. Nobody talked to him, but instead stayed clear of him because of his condition. The result was that he was a loner. He never smiled. Everyone just saw him as some kind of freak. I confess that as a teenager, we often made fun of Buck.

“After I got saved I worked a bus route. One evening I was picking up people to bring to church. I was driving down the road and saw Buck. This time I saw him in a way I had never saw him before. I stopped and told him that I ran a bus through here and took people to church. If he wanted I would pick him up and take him to church. The next evening I came through and there was Buck standing beside the road. I later learned that he had stood there for hours waiting on me to come. He never missed a service after that.

“He couldn’t talk, but just grunt. I was able to learn that he had been saved. It was hard to be around him at times because of his drooling problem, but I would talk to him and tease him. My home church opened their hearts to Buck. I saw that man turn from a distant and isolated person into one who smiled from ear to ear. When he saw me he would smile from ear to ear, start pointing at me, grunting as loud as he could. I never saw him after I went off to Bible School. He was put in a state home later. They said they had to drag him away screaming and

fighting. He didn't want to leave his church and the friends he had found at church. In Buck I saw what love could do."

Gene Barron said, "The world will not care what we know until they know we care." What a difference could be made in this world if we saw people with eyes of love. Also, as we look at this love we see:

#### B) The Heart of Love That Shares

When one has eyes of love, it affects the heart. John says, "*But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?*" The implication is that when we love we will open up our heart and respond to the needs that we see.

John is describing love in shoes. It has been said that love is a verb, not a noun. Love acts and reacts. Love responds to others in a time of need. We not only see, but we share from our resources.

One evening the Broadway musical star, Mary Martin, was to perform on a stage in the South Pacific. Just before she went on she was handed a note from Oscar Hammerstein, who was on his deathbed. The note read, "Dear Mary, A bell is not a bell till you ring it. A song is not a song until you sing it. Love in your heart is not put there to stay. Love isn't love till you give it away." Never had Mary performed as she did that night. Afterwards she was asked about the performance and she showed them the note and said, "Tonight, I gave my love away."

John is speaking of a love that we give away. There are many outside the walls of the church that are waiting for someone to give their love away. You can give without loving, but you can't love without giving.

Last, notice with me that John describes a:

### 3. Love That Is Unconditional

We read in 1 John 4:8-11, "*Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so 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 propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*" Also in 1 John 4:19 we read, "*We love because He first loved us.*"

We are to love as Jesus loved. How did Jesus love? He loved us in an unconditional way and with an unconditional love. His love was and is not limited or based on any conditions. His love is purely unconditional. His unconditional love is seen in that His love is:

#### A) A First Love

1 John 4:19 says, "*We love because He first loved us.*" Our love for Him is motivated by His love for us. He loved us when we did not love Him. He loved us when we hated and rejected Him. He did not love us because we first loved Him. No, ten thousand times no! There were no preconditions to His love for us.

When we love like Jesus there will be no demands to our love. We will love regardless of how others feel about us or how they respond to us. We will love no matter who or no matter what.

Secondly, His love is:

#### B) A Full Love

1 John 4:9 says, *“In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.”* God’s love is seen in the giving of His Son. Christ’s love is seen in how He gave His life for us. Jesus gave everything. He gave His life! His love knows no limits. What is even greater, it was a love shown unconditionally. I did nothing to deserve such love.

When we love like Jesus we will love fully. There will be no limits or restraints to our love.

Also, His love is:

#### C) A Forgiving Love

We read in 1 John 4:10, *“In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”* His love was a forgiving love. Our sins were many. Oh, the sins that we were guilty of, but He loved us anyway.

It has been said that Christians are the only army in the world that shoot their wounded. I know some who when someone falls, they shoot them while they are down.

However, when we love as Jesus loved, we will be forgiving. Love restores and even covers. The Bible says in 1 Peter 4:8, *“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.”* Love never condones sin, but never seeks to make public the sins of others if possible. Its objective is to be discreet in order to save a name and reputation.

Lastly, we see that His love is:

#### D) A Faithful Love

The Bible says in 1 John 4:11, *“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”* I want you pay close attention to the words, *“God so loved.”* God so loved us in the past, He so loves us in the present, and will so love us in the future. He will never cease to love us. When we love like Jesus we will love continually. Our love will not be fickle like the weather. We will love all people all the time.

Some children were asked, “What is love?” One little girl replied, “Love is when your mommy reads you a bedtime story. True love is when she doesn’t skip any pages.” A great church member is a loving church member and they do not skip any pages. They love unnaturally, unselfishly, and unconditionally.

If members would love as God tells us to love, it will produce a loving church, and a loving church is a great church. In Jesus’ name. Amen.