

“TRULY GOD IS LOVE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: Deuteronomy 7:7-8; John 3:16; Romans 5:8; I John 3:1.

Introduction.

We have spent the summer looking into the character and nature of God through His attributes. Americans in general and Christians in particular on the whole have a very anemic and shallow view of God partly because we have not spent time seriously reflecting on what the Scriptures teach us about God. This weak and shallow understanding comes to light especially as we look at the last two attributes.

Love and wrath. I have saved two of the biggest attributes for last. I debated with myself about which I should do first. Should I do wrath first and get that out of the way and end on the high note of love? Or should I do love first so we have a context for understanding wrath as coming from a loving God? My choice is obvious, but one of my reasons will be clear next week.

What is love?

Love is that attribute of God in which He exercises His unmerited kindness and goodness and favor for the benefit and blessing of individuals.

Here is one way I experienced it this past weekend. Part of the pre-wedding festivities included a guy's trip to Wrigley Field to see the Cubs play the Cardinals. I bought 15 tickets and on Friday morning I asked by college roommate, Ken, to remind me to make sure I had the tickets when we left for the train. So there we are standing on the train platform, I look at my watch, the train is two minutes late and then Ken asks me if I have the tickets. Instant panic.

The tickets are on the kitchen counter, the train is overdue, the next train is an hour later and fourteen guys including my five sons are staring at me. Ken calls his wife to bring the tickets to the next station, hoping she gets before we do. She gets there and still no train, so she drives to our station. We get the tickets and two minutes later the train arrives, 25 minutes behind schedule but perfect timing for us. I am overwhelmed by the kindness of God.

But there is more. At the stadium our tickets are in two separate groups and we really wanted to sit together. The game is sold out. The eight seats in front of our one group are empty so we sit in them until the people they belong to show up. But they never show up. The only empty seats around and God reserved them for us. The unmerited, undeserved goodness of God.

What is God's love like and how is it different from human love?

First, truly God is love.

I John 4:8 God is love.

Not love is God, not God is loving, but God is love. It is His nature, His essence. This is a massive claim. That God is love is one of the greatest realities of the universe. It is impossible to conceive of a world without it.

Love is active and all of God's activity is loving. He actively seeks to do good to us. God is not unsympathetic or uncaring or disinterested. He actively loves us, suffers for us, fights for us, defends us, pursues us with a jealous love, and is tender toward us. Love is the cause of all God's actions in human history, whether creating, ruling, judging or saving.

Love is giving and God is an overflowing giver. He is the fountain of everything true and good and beautiful in the world. God is an extravagant, generous, benevolent, joyful giver.

God's love is perfect and casts out all fear. If you believe that God loves you and has nothing but good for you then all fear vanishes. If God is for us, who can be against us?

“The body they may kill, God's truth abideth still, His kingdom is forever” (Martin Luther).

Second, God's love is sovereign. Love is God's free choice.

When a man wants to marry, he chooses the woman he wants to be his wife, he selects her above all others and he asks her, and she chooses whether to say yes or not.

After the fall God had a choice. He could have written us all off and sent all of us to hell. Or He could choose to pursue rebellious mankind across the centuries to show His love by extending grace and mercy to those who accept His free offer of love through Jesus.

God's love is sovereign, He chooses according to His good pleasure who He will love. When God said, “Jacob I loved and Esau I hated” there was nothing to make God love one and not the other. They had the same mother, they were born at the same time, yet it pleased God to love one and not the other.

John 15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you.

The love of God is free, spontaneous, uncaused and uninfluenced. God's love is like grace, it is undeserved and unmerited. While we were sinners and ungodly, God loved us and Christ died for us. The sole reason and cause for God loving us is God Himself.

There is nothing in us that could win God's love. There is none who is good, none who is righteous, none who is without sin. He first loved us when we were loveless.

Do you know what that means? There is also nothing in us that can prevent Him from loving us once He has decided to, and nothing that will be able to separate us from His love.

How humbling is this that so great a God should love a wretch like me?

Third, God's love is infinite and eternal, it is inexhaustibly great, limitless, unfathomable and incomprehensible.

From God's other attributes we can better understand what God's love is like. Because God is eternal His love has no beginning or end. Because God is infinite His love has no limit, it is inexhaustible. Because God is immense His love is more vast than the ocean, more unfathomable than the deepest sea and more incomprehensible than all the universe.

Psalm 103:11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him.

Psalm 136:1 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Jeremiah 31:3 I have loved you with an everlasting love.

Since God's love for us had no beginning, it can have no ending. From before the foundations of the earth, from before we had any being, our names were written on His heart. Paul prays we:

Ephesians 3:18-19 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

It is great because depths can never be plumbed, its heights never reached, its width and breadth defy measurement and its purposes cannot be frustrated. God's love always wins.

Fourth, God's love is an immutable, unchanging, unquenchable love.

Micah 7:18-20 He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.

19 He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot.

You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

20 You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham,
as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old.

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

Why is this important? Because you are going to encounter many challenges, many trials, many hardships and heartaches in life that Satan will try to use to get you to question God's love.

Jesus is called the beloved of the Father. No one has ever been loved more by God than Jesus. Yet consider what Jesus experienced. He went through every imaginable trial and temptation, incredible hardship and heartache. He experienced hunger and thirst, poverty, disgrace and persecution.

None of those things were incompatible with God's love for Jesus. Let us never call into question the love of God even in the severest of trials or difficulties or losses.

Nothing can change God's love, nothing can separate us from God's love. It would be a violation of God's wisdom, faithfulness and covenant kindness for Him to reverse His love toward us.

Fifth, God's love is holy.

Everyone agrees God is love, but not everyone really understands this. They reason that a loving God would never send anyone to hell. Hell is going to be full of surprised people who assumed God would never send anyone to such a place. They ignore all the other attributes of God, that He is holy, just, righteous, wise, perfect and that His ways are not our ways.

God's love is holy. His love never conflicts with His holiness. God's love is not weak or indulgent or soft or effeminate. His love is strong, pure, unmixed.

God loves righteousness and hates iniquity. Without holiness no one will see the loving God.

Sixth, God's love is tough love. It includes discipline that's meant to produce holiness in us.

Hebrews 12:5-6 My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.

Hebrews 12:10 ... he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. 11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

God's love is more clearly seen in the big picture, when we see the long term fruit.

Seventh, God's love is a sacrificial, saving love, tangible and costly.

This is the supreme expression of God great love, His extreme kindness and amazing grace in saving us sinners at the tremendous cost of His Son's death on the cross.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Romans 5:8 God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

I John 4:9-10 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. 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.

God doesn't love us because Christ died for us, Christ died for us because God loves us.

The marvel of God's love is that He could love a world like ours, and that instead of judgment He offers salvation and reconciliation. We see the greatness of God's love in His love for an infinitely sinful world.

Eighth, God's love is an adopting love. There is a special love and bond when parents adopt a child. They freely chose to take in a child and to give it their name, their affection, their whole hearts.

I John 3:1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

God delights in His Son. God delights in His adopted children. God has intense pleasure in His adopted children. Because of Christ, all who believe in Him, become the objects of God's affection. He loves those who love His Son.

God's love is personal and real and intimate. He doesn't just love the world or mankind, but He loves each believer as His own child, He knows our name and the hairs of our head.

There is no created creature that has been forgiven like we have been, so there is no creature that can know how great and high and rich and tender is the Father's love for us. He who has been forgiven much, loves much.

It is cause for worship, for everlasting wonder and marvel at the goodness of God.

Ninth, God's love is the source of all the other love in the world.

How do atheists explain love? Where did it come from, how did it evolve, how does it fit with the selfish and self-centered notion of survival of the fittest?

I John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God.

I John 4:19 We love because he first loved us.

God's love for us is the source our love for each other. Love is the image of God in us.

Implications and Applications.

How is it that people hate and resist and ignore such a great God who loves with such a great love? Do you love God? Is God your greatest treasure, the most valuable reality in your life, your pearl of great price? Is He better than life itself to you? Can you say out loud, you love God with all your heart?

If you can't say that, then I urge you to ask Jesus to send His Holy Spirit to you so that Romans 5:5 would be true for you, that

Romans 5:5 ... God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

If you say you love God, is it evident in your life, by your fruit? Love is reciprocal. Jesus returned love to the Father.

John 14:31 I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.

What is the mark or evidence of Jesus' love for the Father? Obedience. So it is for us.

John 15:9-10 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

I John 4:11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

This love is not primarily an emotion, but an action. When the Bible says to love our neighbor, it doesn't mean to have warm feelings toward them, it means to seek in some way their well-being even at the sacrifice of our own well-being. Love gives, love does. Love sacrifices and serves.

In a world filled with hate speech and hate crimes, may they know we are Christians by the love we show to our spouse, our neighbors, the people at work and church, even to our enemies.

We show that our love is truly God-like when we love our enemies. This kind of love most reflects God's kind of love, since while we were still enemies and God-haters, He loved us. May the world learn about the greatness of God's love through us.

Now we see God's love dimly, as through a veil. But one day we will see clearly and then we will see that everything here was pure love, God's very best for us. So now by faith we trust and believe what one day we will understand.

Keep your eyes on Jesus and the spiritual and eternal blessings that are ours because of God's love for us in Jesus. "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable Gift!"

Prayer: Almighty and merciful God, we exult and praise you for the greatness of your love and for the incredible reflection of that love in Your Son, our Savior, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the whole world. We rejoice this morning at your gift. Grant that in our own brokenness, anxiety, doubts and fears we may live our lives as a reflection of the Lamb of God, in meekness and humility, in sacrifice and service, in willingness to give in love. May the love of the Lamb make our faith in Christ unshakable, our witness more bold, our love more unconditional. And grant that one day we will see the Lamb in all His glory, standing before the throne of God.