

We Love Because He First Loved Us
1 John 4:16-21

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

The word love is used 14 times in our text. Love - what an interesting word. It is a word that is thrown around all over the place. The Beatles told us a while back, that love is what the world needs now. As we see the turmoil in our world, the shootings that have taken place, most people still quote the Beatles in this regard.

When we are honest with ourselves, love is rather fickle in our lives, isn't it. How often is your love for others based upon a contingency plan? Have you ever used the word "love" as a lever to get something from someone else? I am sure you have either used it in this way, or had it used on you in this way, "If you really loved me, you'd..." Or maybe in another version, "How can you treat me like that, I love you?" Kids love to throw that one at their parents, "If you loved me, you would let me... do whatever it is that a parent said "no" to – maybe to change curfew or some such."

How many couples have ended their marriages because they were no longer in "love." What was the definition of love that was so easily cast aside? Certainly not the definition of love used in our text. How is love defined in those circumstance? Some claimed they were no longer in love because, "the spark just isn't there anymore." Too often even in marriage, love is contingent upon whether you are getting from your spouse what you want them to give you.

Some will love their spouse as long as they look good. Once that youthful figure is gone, they look for love elsewhere. The porn industry - magazines, movies, and on the internet is a booming market because there are so many people out there looking for what is not really "love," in all the wrong places.

For those relationships outside of marriage, what is love? If someone treats you well, you'll love them? People can even have their love bought, sometimes the price is pretty high. It is amazing how many parents try to buy the love of their children by giving them "things."

How often have I heard people say, "I love the Packers!" But if they lose, you should hear the names those who "loved" them call the team. Yeah, people love the Packers, but the key is, "only if they win." Otherwise, they're a bunch of bums.

Of course, when we talk about love, we must also examine what others often call the other side of that emotion, hate. That word is also used in our text. *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. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.* (vv. 20-21)

How easy it is to bandy the word "hate" around, just like the word love. How many parents have heard that word directed at them from their children when they did not get what they wanted? "Mommy, I hate you!" Family members can throw that word around so easily, "Ooooh, I hate

him or her when he/she does that.”

We have used the words “love,” and “hate,” in strange ways, never realizing what we’re saying. Our text however is not telling us how we are to use either of these words. It is telling us about love and hate.

As Christians, it is good that we first understand God’s definition of hate. God’s definition of hate in our text is the lack of love. Or, you might say it this way, anti-love. Hatred is more than just a feeling in the heart, it is thinking evil of or toward another, an unwillingness to forgive and/or to love another.

Love is an action, it is doing something for another when they cannot, usually at the doer’s expense. To hate, is not just a feeling, but an active doing to bring some sort of harm to another.

Jesus tells of the rich man and Lazarus. Lazarus was a poor man, a man who was so disabled and sick that he could not work. He was laid – by others – at the gate to the rich man’s house. This rich man hated him. No, I do not mean he had some feeling of despising him in his heart, of that we are not told. We are told however that all Lazarus wanted were the food the fell from rich man’s table – even this the rich man could not give him

Here was a man in need, and the rich man could not love him. Even the dogs had more compassion for Lazarus than the rich man, they licked his sores. There was no love in the rich man, there was no action on his part to care for Lazarus.

Franklin and Alvin were best of friends - from kindergarten through high school - even attending the same church. They were also competitive, playing sports together, each trying to outdo the other. They went to different colleges, then came back home and that competition continued as they opened competing businesses. Their relationship soured though, for their competition was for a limited market and then, also for the same girl. Friendship soured to dislike; then to anger; then evolved into outright hate. Both went to church regularly, served on various committees (but never together, both communed frequently, and both claimed that Jesus was Lord of their life. But you could feel the chill in the air when they were forced to be together. Friends and spouses knew never to mention the other’s name, or visceral comments would be made.

Some would say, there was no love lost between them. Fact is, there was no love whatsoever.

Jesus instructed that if we have something unreconciled with our brother, we should not come to the altar. We should first be reconciled with our brother and then come. While these two illustrations might seem like extreme examples, you may recognize yourself there, if you are honest. You do harbor hatred in your heart, for you do not love everybody as you ought. And, as John recorded God’s Word for us, *If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar.*

I know that there are days that I am unlovable, sometimes more so than at other times. I know that I don’t always love others as I should. There are people that absolutely frustrate the bejeebers out of me, and my attitude toward them isn’t always what it ought to be – and so I may

go out of my way to avoid helping them, even when I know they have a need.

We ought to be terrified of the last day, for God's requirement that we love our neighbor as ourselves, we have not kept.

But it is also true that there is no fear in love, for perfect love casts out fear. You, my friends, are the dearly beloved of God.

Let us hear our Epistle, but begin with the two verses preceding our text. God informs us through John's pen, *we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 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. 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. 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. We love because he first loved us.* (1 John 4:14-19)

It was on Good Friday when Christ displayed His great love for you. Knowing that you do not love perfectly, He gave His love into death upon the cross. Three days later, He rose, proclaiming His loving work completed.

That is true love! True love is self-sacrificing! True love gives of self for the benefit of another.

It was Christ's perfect love, given to you in baptism, that united you to His death. His perfect love draws you into Himself and raises you to live a new life of love.

His perfect love gave to you His Spirit. It is this Spirit which draws you together with the whole family of faith into this place.

The perfect love of God in Christ Jesus drives out all fear. There is no fear in the perfect love of God in Christ Jesus, for it was His perfect love that endured the punishment we deserve for our lack of love. There is no fear in that love, for that love of God in Christ Jesus casts out all fear – sin and death are removed with that love – they are nailed to the cross and buried in the tomb.

It is this perfect love of God which comes to you here. Christ loves you here! Christ speaks words of forgiveness, driving out the fear of punishment that would rightly be ours for our hatred. God loves you to love one another.

Christ loves you here! He feeds you His perfect love! He gives you His very own body which was pierced out of love for you. He gives you the very blood His love shed for you. He loves you in Word and meals, driving hatred from you and nourishing you to love, as He has loved you

When you gather here, you abide in love – that is, you live in God's love to you – you live in Christ Jesus. And as our text says, *whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.*

In Christ, you are not only made fully aware of God's love for you – in Christ you are not only

loved by God, but God in Christ Jesus makes His dwelling within you. In Christ, all of God's love is given to you, His perfect love which removes all fear is poured into you, and Christ lives in you. Perfected in God's love, we are free to love, because He first loved us. Amen.