

Christain Character - Love

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[0 : 0 0] Father, we want to just pray and ask for your help this evening as we consider the topic of love. We've probably got all sorts of different things going on in our minds. Many of us are tired from busy days.

We ask please now that you just might give us thoughtfulness and attention, that this might be a blessing to us. Shape our characters, we pray, around your word and around your goodness and grace to us, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Okay, so we are looking tonight at the topic of love in the Christian character series. You did miss somebody.

And so, yes, so we're going to be thinking about the idea of love, that Christians should love God, should love others and should be characterized by love. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.

By this will all men know that you are my disciples if you love one another. If you have not love, you are a... You've already fallen asleep and I've barely started.

[1 : 1 2] A resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. Without love, yeah. Without love, we are just pagan worship. Now, obviously, it is a huge, huge topic.

Jesus tells us that the instruction to love summarizes the Old Testament law. We're told in the Bible that God is love. And so, in some sense, love summarizes the character of God.

So, that means either our choice this evening is we talk about everything and we never end, right? We talk about all of who God is and all of what it means to live for him.

Or, so that's one choice, or we narrow our objectives a little bit and try and spend some time focusing on just a particular aspect of it. Now, I've decided that I'm going to focus on just a more narrow aspect so that we are not here all night.

And I want us to focus our time in 1 John, looking at what he teaches us about love. And the first thing I want you to notice in 1 John is that he distinguishes between the world's love and Christian love.

[2 : 2 0] So, 1 John, chapter 2, verse 15. Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.

Or, chapter 4, verse 19. We loved because he first loved us. In other words, and we'll talk some more about the detail of those verses, but just for now, notice that the world knows about love.

It uses the word, but its definition is distinct from the kind of Christian love that John is talking about. The Christian love that John is talking about is distinct from the world's kind of love and from the love of the things of this world.

So, there is a love that is only possible, says John, for those who have experienced the saving love of Jesus. That's our topic this evening.

Our topic this evening is this distinctive kind of Christian love. So, let's try and tease out first a definition of love. What is love? Well, wet, wet, wet.

[3 : 25] I feel it in my fingers. You know this song? You don't? Anderson doesn't know it. I feel it in my toes. Love is all around me. And so, the feeling grows. It's a, in the world, it's a feeling, isn't it?

It's the tingles. It's an emotion that we cannot control. It overwhelms us and moves us, coming from the inside out. Billie Eilish.

Heard of her, right? So, we're getting a bit more contemporary. I wish you were the best for the rest of your life. I wish you the best for the rest of your life. Felt sorry for you when I looked in your eyes.

But I need to confess, I told you a lie. I said you were the love of my life. Interesting, isn't it? In a sort of pathos in her song, she thought she loved this guy, but it was just pity.

She felt sorry for him when she looked in his eyes, and she thought it was love. The feeling was similar. But now that feeling has gone, so it was a lie to call him the love of my life.

[4 : 28] It was just a temporary feeling. Stormzy says this, If your love is my holy water, girl, just let me drown.

And even if you don't, it's fine. I'm going to read the rest of the song. But it's interesting, as you listen to that, it is, Stormzy's definition of love is mostly physical.

It's mostly about sexual attraction. He wants to drown in the love of this girl. Sex and love are synonymous. Love is a passionate, physical desire.

Now, of course, the world says more than that about love, right? Well, well, well, Billy Eilish and Stormzy are not the great thinkers of our time, are they? But still, I think it is a helpful summary.

In the world, generally speaking, love is a feeling, an overwhelming feeling, but mostly transitory. It's passing. And it has at its heart some kind of physical desire in its most intense form.

[5 : 28] And with all that, love is really, really important in our world, isn't it? The Christian says God is love. I think the world probably says something like love is God, really.

We worship love, don't we? Particularly sex and sexual intimacy. Really, how do you know who you are? You know who you are by who you love. Love defines who you are and what your life is for.

Love is God in our world. So even this sort of transitory feeling worked out in physical passion is the holy grail for our culture. It's what people build their lives around.

Now, if you contrast that with what 1 John says about love, love in John's letter is defined not by our feelings, but defined firstly by God's character. 1 John chapter 4 verse 7.

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from an intense internal feeling. No, love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

[6 : 32] Whoever does not love does not know God because God is love. Here again is this idea that the Christian is uniquely capable of love because they have been born of God, the God of love.

God defines what love is in himself because he himself is love and real love comes from him. Now, that means a number of things, at least two things, right?

One, God did not become love when he created the world. If, say, we were talking about Islam earlier, Allah is not love in himself because he has had no one to love in eternity past, see?

But God is love because God has been loving in eternity. It is intrinsic to who he is, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And so love is not what God became when he created the world, but rather who he is.

Because the world comes from God's love. God's love does not come in response to the world. But secondly, it means that, doesn't it? You have to know God and know the Bible in order to understand what love is.

[7 : 45] Love requires an understanding of God. So listen to what John says next, chapter 4, verse 9. 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. So this love that comes from God, that defines who God is, that he has been loving for all eternity, because God is love, is seen today in God's actions.

You know what love is by knowing who God is, and you know who God is by what God does, and the explanation then for what he has done.

So God's love is seen in the sending of the Son to die on the cross. I want us to come and think about how that helps us define love. But just see how this cements the distinction between Bible love and worldly love.

The implication here is that you cannot understand love, Bible love, without encountering Jesus. God is love in eternity, and that love is revealed in history, so much so that to get to the origins of love, you have to get to the heart of God, and you can only get to the heart of God through Jesus Christ.

[9 : 05] It means, and I think this would be the most shocking part of what we're thinking about this evening, if you were to try and describe it to someone outside of the church, or to talk about it tomorrow morning with somebody at work, or no one's going to work tomorrow, it's bank holiday, right?

Or your neighbor, or a member of your family, who's not a Christian. If you said to them, there is a sense in which that unless you have a saving encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ, you are incapable of loving. It's a shocking thing to say, isn't it?

But that's what 1 John is saying. This kind of love, you are incapable of generating in yourself from yourself. And we're going to think about that and how that works in a moment.

But for now, notice that this means that what the world says about love is actually a gospel issue, right? See, we live in a world, don't we, which says love is love, so that people should just be allowed to express love in whatever way they want to.

And, you know, marriage is defined just about two people who love each other and want to spend their lives together. It's a feeling that people have towards one another. And then people get a bit bent out of shape when we say that actually, you know, we want to define marriage carefully and we want to define love carefully.

[10 : 15] But that's right, isn't it? Because there is a particular kind of Christian gospel love, which is at the heart of who God is, seen in the work of Christ.

So love is a gospel issue. Now, we're going to talk a bit more about that in a moment, but I want you now, just with the person next to you, to have a look at verses 9 and 10 and see whether you can write a concise definition of love from 1 John chapter 4 verses 9 and 10.

1 John chapter 4 verses 9 and 10. Let me read them to you again and then you can write your definition of love with the person next to you. 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 love God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Okay, write a definition of love.

If it rhymes, you get extra bonus points. If it has a tune, then you're knocking it out of the park. Okay. Okay.

[11 : 22] That was quite a difficult thing to do, but does anyone want to... At least what aspects, okay? What kind of things does our definition of love have to have in it? Oh, come on, Sarah, yeah.

God sacrificed his son for me, if that is it. Yes, okay. So sacrifice, giving, for the benefit of the loved one, not the lover.

Yeah, yeah. Great. Did it rhyme? Was it in a... Did it have a tune? Yeah, that's right.

Anybody else? Anything else? No. No. yeah yeah yes so the love that we're talking about in 1 john is is not dependent upon loveliness in the object of the love yeah and so that's really different yeah yeah something yeah yeah yeah interesting yeah so we didn't go seeking for it it sought us yeah yeah yeah go on yes interesting yeah so that the the sort of the the zenith of its beauty is the relational reconciliation that it brings yeah interesting yeah yes god's love as we were talking exists before the foundation of the world yes and he set his love on us even before the foundation of the world yeah yeah which yes yes yes yeah it's reaching out yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah great let's keep moving because it's nearly quarter past seven so let's talk about the source of love i want to show you next is that uh this love of god is now the source of our love so that christian love is unique and distinct from the world not because the world is incapable of anything that looks like love or even has some of the hallmarks of it but because it's not possible to love christianly without god's work in our heart look back uh chapter 4 verse 11 one john dear friends since god so loved us we also ought to love one another no one has ever seen god but if we love one another god lives in us and his love is made complete in us this is how we know that we live in him and he in us he has he has given us of his spirit and we have seen and testified that the father has sent the son to be the savior of the world if anyone acknowledges that jesus is the son of god god lives in them and they in god and so we know and rely on the love god has for us god is love whoever lives in love lives in god and god in them this is how love is made complete among us so that we may have so so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment in this world we are like jesus 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 we love because he first loved us now we don't have time to go through all the detail of those verses i'm not sure i understand all of them properly anyway so that's a project for the future but

notice this big idea god is love his love is seen in the person of the son the cross where he died for us in and then we as his children are instructed to love in that manner so love is a command that you are given but it's a command that is also enabled because we are able to obey this command to love because this love that we are to have for others is an overflow of the love that we have received from god a love poured out into our hearts now by his spirit comes out from us so there's an ought to love isn't there you ought to love others but there's also a you are able to love others because god has made it possible so just as the definition of love that we considered earlier is different from the world this is because the source of this love is different to the world isn't it this love is not an emotional response it is a spiritually empowered generosity that comes from a transforming personal experience of the love of god let me say that again it's a spiritually empowered generosity a spiritually empowered self sacrificial generosity to others that comes from a transforming personal experience of the love of god in our hearts now let's think about the designs then of this love what is this love wanting to achieve what is it trying to get to where is it going what is it hoping will be the fruit come back again to one john chapter 2 and verse 15 which we started with do not love the world or anything in the world if anyone loves the world love for the father is not in them for everything in the world the lust of the the lust of the flesh the lust of the eyes and the pride of life comes not from the father but from the world the world and its desires pass away but whoever does the will of god lives forever now i think if you look at those verses they're quite surprising one john you know another famous john book right same john but different book do not love the world or anything in the world if anyone loves the world the love of the father is not in them do you not know a verse that sort of seems to contradict that what does john 3 16 say for god so love the world right okay so what's what's going on here so i i think you probably i think there's probably something in john's use of the word cosmos or the word world um where he's using it slightly differently here so it could mean creation it could mean humanity and it could mean evil in rebellion against rebellion against god and i think here is the latter of those so here in contrast to john 3 16 which i think is about humanity here this is the evil in the world and so we are we are not to love evil or anything evil and there's a contrast isn't there between love from god and love from the world so the love of the world comes from the world and desires the things of the world which will pass away which will pass away it's called lust isn't it it is lusting after the flesh the lust of the eyes and pride of life whereas the love of god comes from the father and lives forever so love of the world love from the world is self-seeking it desires itself it desires its own satisfaction is self-interested and it is destined for hell contrast that with one john chapter 3 16 this is how we know what love is jesus christ laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters if anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or a sister in need but has no pity on them how can the love of god be in that person dear children let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth

[20 : 08] john is laboring this point over and over and over again we believe don't we that being a christian is at its heart a transforming experience of the spirit god comes and dwells in our hearts what he has done for us in the person of christ flows into our hearts by the spirit and if that does not lead us to love others like that the question is have we really experienced this kind of love from god if you have no pity on your brother and sister in need how can you have no pity on your brother and sister in need how can you have experienced this love from god because it is not seemingly pouring out of you so christian love love from the father desires the good of the other it sets its designs on the well-being of the other and not on itself now of course there's a reason isn't there that only a christian can love like that in genuine concern for the other and not for itself is because of where it comes from christian love pours out from the love of god in jesus you know a love that gives us everything we need means that we can be generous to others a love that satisfies righteous judgments at our sin love that secures our place in glory love that reconciles us brothers and sisters means that we can love now without any selfish desire because if christ is mine i have all i need right so i'm not loving with any selfish desire for credit from god because full credit is mine in christ i'm not loving for any desire really in one sense i'm not loving for any desire to build relationships with others because those relationships are secured in the person of christ already so i am not loving you so that you're pleased with me and when you're no longer pleased with me i no longer love you because i'm loving you because christ has brought us together as brothers and sisters so christian love is a self-giving commitment focused on the benefit of the other that is empowered by a transforming experience of the love of god a self-giving commitment focused on the benefit of another that is empowered by a transforming experience of the love of god now if that's right what difference does that make to our church our lives and our relationships with one another let me end here we'll have a little bit of chance to discuss it together i've been reading um bonhoeffer has anyone read bonhoeffer's book life together so bonhoeffer was a german pastor in the 1930s and 40s in nazi germany he was training a group of uh young ministers and in an attempt to keep it secret he took the students away they lived together in community and they studied in a remote location and the book that he wrote based on his teaching and his experience was called life together and it's on christian community and i um i recommend it to you and he makes a really big distinction between human love and divine love unpicking the the selfish undertones of our own human love and he is like penetratingly devastating on this as he says that lots of what we experience in church is really just human love and not this kind of divine christ-like love let me give you a couple of quotes i think have i put them on your handout i think i have human love is directed to the other person for his own sake spiritual love loves him for christ's sake therefore human love seeks direct contact with the other person it loves him not as a free person but as one whom it binds to itself it wants to gain to capture by every means it uses force it desires to be irresistible to rule so this worldly love is trying to shape mold control the person that it's loving because it it requires those things back from it in order to keep going because it's a feeling that is

internally generated human love lives by uncontrolled and uncontrollable dark desires spiritual love lives in the clear light of service ordered by the truth human love produces human subjection dependence constraint spiritual love creates freedom of the brethren under the word human love breeds hot house flowers spiritual love creates the fruits that grow healthily in accord with god's goodwill in the rain and storm and sunshine of god's outdoors his point is that human love gives up really easily when it ceases to receive back what it wants and then that love can very quickly turn to something that looks like hate because we say well if you're not going to behave in the manner in which i want you to behave i am going to push you out exclude you and no longer love you and that he says is not spiritual love and he says when he's talking about truth what he's saying is that human love is prepared not to deal with the truth it's prepared to build itself on a lie because it so wants this feeling and this feedback from one another it's prepared to say things which aren't really true whereas if you want to say something that is true and difficult to hear so if i wanted to say someone you wanted to say to me something that i needed to hear that was difficult and you knew it was going to provoke a response in me that would not be pleasing to you if it was just human love that was between us you would not say it right but you wouldn't care about it because you don't care about truth but if we love like christ loves we love the truth so you need to say steve you shouldn't have spoken like that you shouldn't have said it like that you were rude it was it was wrong to do that and that might make me bristle but that's okay you love me enough you're not loving me on condition of me not bristling you're loving me with love that comes from christ which cares about the truth and so you say a difficult thing and that's so it's not always that um that love christian love means it's all nice and cozy actually at times it's really difficult because we say difficult things to one another so i want you just with the person next to you just to have a think about what does that mean it would be like to be a loving church what would a loving church look like um if that was true and then we'll stand and sing our closing him in a few minutes okay does anyone want to chip in yes yeah yes yeah yes yes that's really a genuine concern for others yeah and that's so rare isn't it i you know i confess that i'm not always good at this i i think you can you can talk to people without really being that interested in necessarily what they're saying or how they're doing and really wanting to get to know you know how can we actually pray for you what's really going on in your life how are you really doing yeah yeah yes it can be inconvenient it is always inconvenient you're right mike yeah yeah which is why we don't do it yeah yeah but that's a lack of love yeah yes so sincerity and honesty yeah

yeah yeah if love in church is conditional on our performance then we're not going to be able to be honest with one another are we it's gonna be a very difficult place to struggle or fail yeah yeah yeah yes accountability yeah yeah yeah yeah to sacrifice yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah um that's so helpful i can't really summarize that for you if you're on zoom but uh it's kind of a willingness to push past the discomfort that that will cause ourselves so it's possible to say that we love someone and show some level of concern but only to the point at which it starts to cost us something yeah go on charleston yeah yeah so a willingness to talk to all different kinds of people absolutely yeah yeah go on vanessa yeah yeah yeah yeah

Yeah. So a willingness to accept that. Yeah. One other thing I want to say that I just don't think we've touched on just yet is that I think if we're going to be a loving church, we've we've got to be a church that that goes desperately to Jesus for the resources to love one another.

If we're essentially being asked to run a marathon, right? We're being asked to do something that's really difficult and really expensive in terms of spiritual resources. So we've got to keep coming to Christ for the resources to love one another, haven't we?

[31 : 09] So I think probably one of the things we'd see if we're a loving church, you see a church that is hungry for God's word, hungry for Jesus, wants to spend as much time with him as they can personally and corporately, because they're feeding on the love of God, because they know that they need to give out in that in that love as well.

So we we can sustain an unloving church in our own strength, can't we? But if we want to be a loving church, we're going to have to receive that from the Lord and keep receiving it.

OK, we are going to close by singing. So let me pray for us in summary and then we're going to sing love divine or love's excelling. So let me pray. Father, we thank you that your love for us is exceeding all other loves.

And thank you that you have poured that love into our hearts and now it pours out to others. Pray, Lord, that you might help us to be a loving church when that's costly and difficult.

Because, Lord, you have first loved us in Jesus name. Amen.