

It was noted the other day that there was an anniversary of that movie that came out in the 70's called "Love Story" with the famous line — that theologically wrong famous line — "*Love means never having to say you're sorry!*" And of course, love is the common theme in much of the arts — music, movies, TV shows and plays all about love etc. Indeed, it is a common theme through much of life.

We think of some of the more popular songs — "*All you need is love... love is all you need...*" "*What the world needs now is love, sweet love... that's the only thing that theirs much to little of..*" And in many respects, though, there is a measure of truth to these words. If everyone loved as they ought to love — then there would be much fewer problems in the world today — in families, in cities, in politics, in countries — in just about every area of our lives. Families would be happier... jails would be less crowded... countries would not be at war with each other... and the list goes on.

But the question that remains is — what kind of love?? Whose definition of love should we use?? It certainly cannot be the media's definition of love — because that is based mostly on emotion and feeling.

The Bible says a lot about love and one of the clearest places is in our Epistle lesson from this morning — so turn with me to 1 John 4:7. The passage before us may be the strongest single passage in the Bible concerning the love of God. In the short passage that we read we see the word for love — *agape* — used 32 times.

I guess God wants to teach us about love — even more so, because there are two other references to love in this short Epistle of 1 John. We read these words in 1 John 2:7-11 (READ) and then we read 1 John 3:11-18 (READ).

In the scriptures there are two basic words for love — *agape* and *phileo*. *Phileo* means "brotherly love" — it is the word from which Philadelphia gets its name — the city of brotherly love. The other word, *agape* — is the word used here in our passage... and in the N.T. whenever it talks about God's love for us... God's love for the world... God's love for His people... and also for the love that we are to have for one another, including our spouses.

This is the same word that is used in the familiar love chapter of the Bible — 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, where we read: "*Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things...*"

Notice love is something that does certain things... does not do certain things — it is an act of the will. Interestingly enough, as I said, this is the type of love that husbands are to have for their wives — not an emotion — but rather, it is something that we do.

While there is a certain amount of emotion involved, at its foundation it is a love of the will. It is a love that is ... it is a love that does. But, as we see from our passage — it is something that we are to all have. It is a love that is to be part of all of us.

I like to say that it is a love that IS — an unconditional love — not based on what the other person does or doesn't do. It is "other oriented" — that is, it is directed towards the other person away from ourselves.

Turning back to our passage in 1 John 4 we see that this passage can be summarized very simply — love originates from God and the person who loves God must love also. The love that we have, has its root in the love of God. It is that simple.

We see a number of things about God's love and then we see what the effects should be in our lives from this passage and the other passages in 1 John. The first thing that we see about God's love is that God's love IS — verse 8 & 16 says simply — “*God is love.*”

This is part of the character and being of God.... Part of His very essence. “*God is love.*” We have to see clearly, that while God loves His people — and we will see more of this in a moment — in other words, the actions of God's love — we see here that it is simply part of the character and being of God — “*God IS love.*”

Augustine said on this: “*If nothing were said in praise of love throughout the pages of this Epistle, if nothing were said in praise of love throughout the pages of the Scriptures, and this one thing only were all we were told by the voice of the Spirit of God, **For God is love**; nothing more ought we require.*”

The 2nd thing that we see that God loved us first — 4:19 “*We love Him because He first loved us.*” We see that we have to love — and again, we will see more of this in a moment, because this is our response to the love of God — but the important thing for us to realize is that God loved us FIRST. Think about that for a moment — “*He first loved us.*” Here we see the matchless, incomparable grace of God — “*He first loved us.*”

The character and being of God is such that He loved us first — our character and being is such that without the love of God — we cannot truly love. The Bible tells us that without the love of God — we cannot know Him, because we are separated from Him because of our sin. But, through the grace of God — we know Him... He loves us — and then we are able to love.

This leads us to the next thing about the love of God — that God sent Jesus to die for our sins. 4:9,10: “*In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, 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.*”

The expression of God's love is that He sent Jesus into the world to die for us and our salvation. We are all familiar with John 3:16: “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*” This is how God showed His love for us.

So, we see that He first loved us — and showed that love by sending Jesus into the world to die for our sins. This is where we truly see the love of God — because not only did He send Jesus into the world — but Jesus came into the world to die on the cross for the sins of those who believe in Him. Jesus died for our sins, in our place. And in doing so he satisfied the justice of God.

Even though God is love — He cannot just let sin go... He cannot just say “well, it's no big deal, you need to try and do better.” Even though God is love... He can't just say — oh well, you made a mistake — don't do it again. Even though God is love, His righteousness and justice demanded that a sacrifice be made for our sin because it is such an offense to Him.

That is why in the O.T. He set up a series of sacrifices for His people to follow and observe. But we know that

all these sacrifices looked forward to the one final and perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And so we have the greatest expression of God's love — Jesus Christ — coming into the world to die for the sins of His people.

“God is love...” — it really doesn't get any better than this. This is the Memorial Day weekend — when we remember those who gave their lives for us. They gave their best. The love of God is such, that He sent His very best — the Lord Jesus Christ — and he did it first. Romans 5:8, a verse that I often quote before I dismiss you from the rail at the Lord's supper says: *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* He did it first, my friends. He loved us first.

But, that then leads us to our response to His love. We don't take the love of God for us and say — Oh, that's nice.... isn't that great. No, God says in 4:7 *“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.”* As Christians, we reflect the love that God has to a world without love. There is a world out there that is in desperate need of love. Indeed *“What the world needs now is love, sweet love... that's the only thing that theirs much to little of...”* — but it is a love of God's definition.

We see all the violence and unhappiness in the world — and it is simply a reflection of the lack of love that is evident — evident in the lives of individuals... in our families... in our homes... in schools... in our country and in the nations around the world. I do not think that it is stretching it too far to say that the vast majority of problems in our society are because of a lack of Biblical love.

I do acknowledge that this lack of love stems from the fact that we are all sinners. But that only makes it even more imperative for us as Christians to reflect the love of God and of Christ to the world around us.

There is a little chorus, that some of you may be familiar with that goes: *“They will know that we are Christians by our love...”* If Christians do not love and do not show the love that God has for us — who will?? The non-Christian certainly cannot show love — it is up to the Christian to do it.

Only the Christian can reflect the love of God and of Christ in the world. Jesus showed his love as he was dying said: *“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”* Stephen, the first Christian martyr said as he was dying: *“Lord, do not charge them with this sin.”* These are the expressions of Christian love — other oriented, as I said. It embodies the thought — What can I do for you — not, what's in it for me.

The 2nd thing that we see is that we love God. We have already seen that God loved us first — but in response to this, we can then love God. And the evidence of loving God is that there is no fear and that we keep His commandments. 4:18 says: *“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.”* And this fear, is connected with obedience to God.

When we do something wrong — what is there?? — there is fear of being caught. If we go 65 MPH in a 35 MPH zone, there is a fear of being caught. If we steal something — there is a fear of being caught. But we read: *“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear...”* If we strive to do what is right before God, according to His word, we don't have to fear and there is this desire to keep the law of God.

We read in 5:2,3 *“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.”*

We realize that we will not keep the commandments perfectly — if we could, there would be no need for Jesus to have died. But there has to be a desire there to keep the commandments of God... there has to be desire to want to do what is right according to what He has revealed in His word.

If God says that something is wrong — then we have the responsibility to not do it. If God says that we should be doing something — then we should be doing it. This is an evidence of the love that God has for us, and that we are to have for one another.

A 3rd evidence is that of helping one another in their need. 1 John 3:17 says: *“But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?”* We have many opportunities — if we see someone in need — we help them as evidence of the love that we have for God and our fellow man.

The most important way that we show the love of God — is that if there is someone who doesn't know Christ as Savior and Lord — then they have a need — an eternal need and we can be God's instruments in meeting that need. True love for them will evidence itself in our telling them about Jesus Christ — who he is and what he has done.

And then the last evidence is that we must be willing to lay down our lives for others. 1 John 3:16 says: *“By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”* The love of God and Christ was evidenced in the death of Christ.

Again, *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”* And my friends, an evidence of true Christian love, is that we must be willing to do the same — to give our lives for others, as those we remember this Memorial Day Weekend.

These are some of the evidences our faith... evidences of the love of God in our lives and the love that we have for others.

Sometimes, we pride ourselves on the fact that we have great doctrine — that we are orthodox in what we believe — that we believe the essentials of our faith, such as expressed in the Creeds or the 39 Articles of religion — but we forget sometimes, the sum of our faith... the hinge of our faith — that is love.

Every week at the end of the 10 commandments, we recite what is known as the great commandment — Jesus, when asked what was the greatest commandment of the law said: *“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”* *“This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'”* *“On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”*

We have talked at length about this — but we know that we need to love God with all of our heart, soul and mind — we need to know that He is the only God... we need to know that we must not have any idols... we need to know that we must worship Him — and Him only — and remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

And then we need to love our neighbor as ourselves — our neighbor being defined as anyone that we come into contact with — even our enemies. If we love them — we will honor our father and mother... we will not commit adultery... we will not steal, etc. But think about the concluding words that Jesus said: *“On these two*

commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

Jesus is saying that the whole of God's law — the whole of God's revelation to us, hangs on two facts — loving God and our neighbor. If we don't then we really don't know God — and don't have the love of God. In 4:8 we read: *"He who does not love does not know God, for God is love."* And then in 4:20: *"If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also."*

So, my friends, we need to think about the love of God — the love that God has for us — and then we need to think about the love that we have for others. It is not an option — we cannot say that we love God and hate our brother. So, we need to think about our relationships to others — are there those we are in conflict with — and if so, we need to resolve them — and we need to love as God has loved us.

Yes, *"All you need is love... love is all you need..."* and *"What the world needs now is love, sweet love... that's the only thing that theirs much to little of..."* But we need to have love, as defined by God, and expressed in God's way.