



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 John 4:7-12

"The Divinity of Love"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The two little comments that I particularly liked. One, "Your tapes are a big help to us in prison." One of the interesting things is that many of the people in prisons do not have, of course, the money or the opportunity to buy tapes. And the Chapel has through the years been enabled to send a number of tapes to individuals who are in the prisons all over this country. Michigan, Florida, this one is from Mississippi and other places. And we really think that's been a very significant ministry. The one that I particularly like was the comment from Prince Edward Allen, "Thanks for your grace ministry, otherwise I would have been left out." [Laughter] Well, he was talking about grace, not about us. But, nevertheless, that's true.

We're turning for our Scripture reading today to 1 John chapter 4 verse 7 through verse 12. And it's one of the indications we're drawing nearer to the end of our rather lengthy study of this great little epistle by the Apostle John. He's been talking about trying the spirits. He said in the first verse of this chapter, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world."

Now in verse seven, still in the general theme of trying the spirits he writes,

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. (That may be just as well rendered, "everyone that loveth has been born of God and

knoweth God.) He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. (Or that could be rendered, "He that loveth not has not known God; for God is love.") In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein 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, (You can see the apostles language is very similar to that which he wrote in the great text John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." And here again he writes) if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us."

May the Lord bless this reading of his word and let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we thank Thee and praise Thee for the way in which, through the apostles, Thou hast given to us an indication of Thy perfect will for us. We thank Thee for the Apostle John and for the writings that hast given to him to write. We thank Thee for his Gospel and it's unfolding of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. And we thank Thee for the epistles that he has written, as well. And thank Thee for the way in which in them the love of God has manifested in the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ has been unfolded. And we thank Thee that he has also made known to us the fact that we need the forgiveness of our sins. We need to have our sins propitiated. And we thank Thee that through the writings of the apostle we have come to see Thy plan and Thy purpose for sinners. We praise Thee and thank Thee that Thou hast, in the Holy Scriptures, revealed to us our need and caused us by Thy grace to flee to Christ for the forgiveness of our sins.

And we thank Thee, Lord, for the other blessings of life, the providential care that Thou dost manifest over us, guiding us, and directing us, and protecting us. Surely Thou hast been marvelous to the believing children of God.

We pray, Lord, that the ministry of the word today may, by Thy grace, go out to many who do not know him whom to know is life eternal. Bless that ministry. May the Holy Spirit make it fruitful in the lives of men and women all over the face of this globe.

We pray for the whole church. We ask Thy blessing upon all of the believing members of that body wherever they may be. Bless them and enrich their lives through the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray especially for those who've requested our prayers, for them who are sick and ill, and we pray that Thou wilt give healing if it should please Thee. And bless those that minister to them, the doctors, physicians, and the members of their family, and supply the needs that exist.

We pray for this country of which we are a part, for our president, for the president-elect, and for other members of our national, and state, and local governments. We pray for them, as well. Give wisdom beyond our natural endowments, Lord to carry on the affairs of state in such a way that the plans and purposes of our great sovereign God maybe completed in accordance with Thy will.

We pray Thy blessing upon Believers Chapel, upon its elders, and deacons, and the members, and the friends, and the visitors who are here with us today. May this day represent a day of spiritual advance for each one of us personally. May, as the day unfolds, our relationship to Thee become closer and more significant. And in this season of the year in which we think of our Lord's coming, may the full significance of it grip our hearts. Enable us to be submissive to Thy word Lord. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] We said in introducing the Scripture reading that the apostle is still dealing with the question of trying the spirits. There also is a trying of your spirit going on because the message that I'm giving you this morning is a message that essentially I gave to you not too many months back. I'm not going to tell you how many because that's the trial, to see if you can remember. Were you here? Did you know what I said? Because it was a message that I gave on this particular passage dealing with a certain time of the year and now it has come up in the regular exposition of 1 John.

For those of you who remember we will award you a few stars, but for the rest of you I hope you get it this time.

The subject from today is, "The Divinity of Love." Emerson's famous line, "All mankind loves a lover," still strikes a responsive cord in the hearts of men. But today in our society it has a rival, "All mankind loves love." That statement epitomizes the floppy, flabby, wimpy 20th Century. It's said to be the answer to all of our problems. A few years ago in one of our morning papers here in the city of Dallas a film director was seeking to explain the rationale behind a particular film that they had objected, that he had presented. And as he was explaining the rationale of it he said, "I'm trying to show that when the miracle of love happens anything is possible with human beings." And the story of the film was the story of a little girl who rehabilitates two hardened criminals with her love. In our society today there is hardly any problem, whether it's physical, psychological, spiritual which doesn't find its resolution in the minds of many people in what they call love.

One of the great theologians of the 20th Century, Geerhardus Vos, wrote, over eighty years ago, some words on love in a lengthy article that he wrote on that topic. And in this particular article he said, "The love of God occupies a more prominent place than any other divine attribute in present-day Christian consciousness." He also noted that, the demand that God's love and nothing but he loved be made the keynote of every message that Christian had to bring to the world characterized his day, as well. Well that demand has not slackened. If individuals who you might meet on the street were asked, "What is the teaching of Christianity?" very frequently they might say, "Well, it's the teaching of love." And if you were to ask further questions it would be something like this, "That God loves all men and that Christ is the presentation of God's love."

The modern emphasis on the will and the emotions at the expense of the intellect has aided immeasurably the trend to emphasize the emotional aspects of truth. Vos contended that whatever charges must be brought against the intellectualism orthodoxy when it reigns supreme, it could at least claimed to have been broad-minded and well-balanced in its appreciation of the infinite

complexity and richness of the life of God. It may have seemed to have lacked sweetness, but it made better harmonies than the pop strains of emotional love that characterize our day.

He went on to say and said truly that, "It's a well-known fact that all heresy begins with being partial truth," and with this many of us would agree, as well, and agree heartedly. Therefore, the excessive emphasis on love, which is an appealing and meaningful attribute of God, is cause for great concern. He made one final sentence in his article in the section that I was looking at particularly, was almost prophetic in its fulfillment in our society. He went on to say that, "This great emphasis on love will lead to such a one-sidedness and exclusiveness that the result will be a universal weakening of the sense of sin and consequent decline of interest in the doctrine of atonement and the doctrine of justification by faith. Now, we have seen that in the eighty years since Geerhardus Vos, the great Princeton theologian wrote those words for we're living in a day in which love as an emotional, sentimental thing has really taken over in professing Christianity as the teaching of Christians.

Well, as I turn to 1 John chapter 4 I cannot help but think that what we have before us is something that the apostle would give us that counteract that trend and furthermore give us an understanding of God's view of love. And you will see that as we read through this section and comment on a few of the verses of it that the love of God for the Apostle John is centered in the divine sonship and in the messianic mission of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Commentators who discuss this passage in their commentaries entitle this section in different ways. One well-known evangelical entitles it, "In Praise of Love," another, "God's Love and Our Love." And still others make comments concerning the Apostle Paul's treatment of love, and the Apostle John's treatment of love and try to compare them and contrast them. Paul's great chapter in 1 Corinthians thirteen has been called a perfect prose poem. What John does when he talks about love is, as many of noted, like a person who takes up a diamond and looks at it and keeps turning it in his hand so that all of the facets of that beautiful gem may be seen and appreciated, that's what John is doing in chapter 2, and chapter 3, and now again in chapter 4. And this will be his

last great section on love. In chapter 4 he will again turn the gem a bit so that we may see some of the beauties of it.

Now, there are three parts to the section. The apostle exhorts us to love in verses 7 and 8, he talks about the manifestation of authentic love in verses 9 and 10, and then the obligation and the issue of Christian love in the last two verses. So we're going to look at it in that way and we turn first to the exhortation to love in verses 7 and 8. "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God."

When we think about Christian love we are often told that there are at least three, fairly closely related in some ways but different in others ways, words for love. One emphasizes sexual love. That word, its noun, and verbal forms are not found in the Bible. Then a second one is a term that refers to love that exists among people who like the same things primarily, though it also has some very high values in it, as well. And then finally, the word that is so common in the New Testament is the word that speaks of the directed will of an individual to love another one in a sacrificial kind of way. Those are just broad terms and some of the words actually refer to other things. One can, for example, find that latter word, that strong word *agapē* in our society. It has become transliterated and well-known. In fact, you can almost speak of agapology, that is the doctrine of *agapē* or love. That term is used of sexual love. In fact, one of the places in the Old Testament and Ammon's passion for Tamar, that term in the Greek Old Testament is used for that sexual love. So these words don't have any clear distinctions but generally those ideas hold.

One of the commentators somewhere to try to bring it down to our level has said the first word that has to do with sexual love, we might say, is all take. And then the second word is the weaker word, is all give is give and take. And then the final one is all give and that is the true biblical kind of love. The apostle uses that third term that is the will of an individual and the expression of his love in a sacrificial kind of way to put it very simply.

Well, the apostle in his exhortation in verse 7 positively enforces that by saying, "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth

God." Now, right here we must make some distinctions. You'll notice he says that, "love is of God." Now, he doesn't mean by that that love is created by God, he means rather that love has its source in God. That is love is the expression that comes out of the being of God, so that love is God's own property. It's his own attribute.

And further, if you see what he is clearly saying, that love is of God, no one can possibly love unless that love has been communicated to him by generation. In other words, no one can truly love biblically who has not been born again. That's plainly what it means. So consequently, everybody in the world who has no relationship to the Lord God in heaven by regeneration, by the new birth, cannot love. He may use the term but his term does not have the meaning the apostles put upon it. It is not apostolic love, "love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God."

As a matter of fact, if an individual ever loves as the word of God sets forth love, he has been born of God. It's that, that new birth, that enables him to love and if he has not experienced the new birth he cannot love in the biblical sense. Well, that seems rather harsh but John is the apostle of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He leaned upon his bosom, he has written magnificent literature. We assume as Christian men and women that apostle was right and if that is so then no one in the world, that is the world of unbelieving men, can love, as God is love.

So, "Beloved, let us love one another," is a term, is a statement addressed to believing men. "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loves is born of God," in other words it cannot be had as a creature, it can only be had as a son of God. It's the kind of love God gives to his sons, his children, and only they can show love. It's the very love with which the Father and the Son love and it implies the knowledge of God. If one has that love, which has come from God, then one knows God. He knows that about him, he doesn't know to the degree that the Son knows the Father, but as a son we know the Lord God.

The apostle does not in any way suggest that we know God as Jesus Christ knows God. But he suggests that we truly know God if we have been born again and love. It's very much like a little child. A little child may have a true knowledge of his father but he doesn't have the knowledge of his

father that he might have when he becomes and adult. I know from my own experience, when I was a little child three or four years of age, I can remember when I was three and four and I can remember specifically, isn't it interesting the things that you remember are frequently the things that you didn't really want to come to pass. I can remember my mother saying one day when I was four that my father would birth home soon and he would have some words to say to me about some things that I had done. And I can still remember that he took the razor strop and it was a very educational experience. [Laughter] Every morning thereafter when I saw him shave and he used a straight razor and he would do like this on that, it suggested other things to me. I remember that very well. We stayed on very good terms generally speaking after that.

Now, I didn't understand much about my father, then but I really knew him. My knowledge was limited, but I really knew him. As the years went by it increased. Now, that's the sense in which John says, "Every one that loveth has been born of God, and knows God." He doesn't know him fully, as a matter of fact will never know him fully. And so consequently we have a true knowledge, but it's a limited knowledge.

Now, when we say that no one can truly love who has not been born of God and that such a person who has been born knows God, how can we really say that in the light of the fact that many people seem to love who do not make any profession of Christian faith at all? As a matter of fact, some seem to be enemies of the faith, but as the world looks at them they appear to be loving individuals. What can we say about them? I know that you have Christian friends, many of you, and you know friends who are not Christians and sometimes when you compare them you probably have been heard to utter the statement, "They are not professing Christians at all but they seem to have a love, in fact a love that is more significant than the love of some of my Christian friends." Well, in the first place you have to ask yourself the question, "Are these Christian friends really Christians?" There are lots of people who confess Christian faith who are not Christians at all and in any local church where the Gospel is preached there will always be such. In Believers Chapel there are such, no doubt. It is generally true. People profess faith in Christ who are really not believers at all.

But let me give a kind of theological answer, at least, to the question. We remember that God has created us all in his image. And if we remember the fall in the Garden of Eden that image was corrupted by the fall but not destroyed. Then we understand, of course, that there are certain likenesses to God that still exist in every man, the image of God. We can't talk about all that that involves, in fact that's a rather difficult theological topic. Furthermore, there is a doctrine, which almost all Christians believe, called the "doctrine of common grace". That is, God does certain things for everyone. This beautiful day that we have out here, the rain that we had a day or so ago, other ways by which God cares for his creatures. That represents his common grace. It's not common in the sense that we sometimes use the term common, but it's universal.

The special love that he has for those who are brought to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ is something else but in common grace there are certain things that might truly reflect the things that find their epitome in those things that God gives to men and women who are truly born again. Ultimately, there is no possibility of an individual truly loving unless he has a belief in Jesus Christ and that resulting love. Listen to what he said in verse 23 of this epistle, "And this is His commandment, that we should believe the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another as he gave us commandment." So human love exists.

We sometimes confuse it with divine love. We are not good and reliable interpreters of the spiritual experience of others. And so consequently, we see people express themselves in an affectionate way and we might call that love, meaning our common definition of love but the biblical definition is something else. Let me put it his way, human love is a very noble thing and some human love is very sacrificial. But human love, however highly motivated, falls short if it refuses to include the Father and the Son as the supreme objects of the affection. In other words, there can never be true biblical love, true apostolic love, true divine love that does not include within it's purview a love first of all of the Lord God in heaven and his Son Jesus Christ. That's what the apostle says. We may not like it, but that's what the apostle says.

So can a non-Christian love? Well, he can certainly have great affection, self-sacrificial and admirable. But divine love belongs to the born again, to those that have been regenerated by the Lord God. John, lest you be confused about this as he frequently, does states the negative, "He that loveth not knows not God; for God is love." To love is to know, to know is to love. To love is the necessity of his nature. He cannot but love and those who have his nature, they cannot but love.

Now, this is a descriptive statement. It's not a reversible statement. In other words, when we say for God is love, we do not say love is God although it is a very significant part of the divine being. Let us also be sure that we do not think that this is necessarily the superior attribute. There are people, believing people who will say, "Of all the attributes of God, the love of God is the superior attribute." The Bible never says that. The Bible, the word of God sets forth a number of attributes as belonging to the divine essence but never asserts that one is superior to the other. It may be congenial to our thinking because it's the popular thing to think that way, and we have exalted that little four-letter word in our society.

But in the biblical language, love is not the supreme attribute of God. There is no supreme attribute of God. Arguments in favor of holiness find a great deal of weight, some in favor of love, perhaps some other attributes as well. We just remember God in his essence, in his being is characterized by love, is characterized by justice, is characterized by holiness and various other things that describe the essence of God.

One thing you can be sure about, and that is that you cannot talk about the love of God and ignore the cross of Jesus Christ. In fact, this statement, "God is love," and we remember the other statements. "God is light," he's mentioned in the first chapter. In the fourth chapter of his Gospel the apostle says, "God is spirit." "God is love," is very significant, of course, but I'd suggest to you that this is a compressed statement of the Gospel itself, "God is love." Now, it's compressed in a compressed statement of the Gospel if you will allow me to define my terms biblically. "God is love," a compressed statement of the Gospel. It's a compressed statement of the Gospel because the love is God is defined in this context.

Verse 10, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sin." So God is love. What love? He sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sin. That's the gospel, that God out of his love sent Jesus Christ to be the sacrifice for our sins, a penal substitutionary sacrifice satisfying the justice of God, which by virtue of our sin perfectly, justly sends men to an eternal separate from God. The gospel is God-is-love manifested in the sending of his Son to be the propitiation for our sin.

Now, to talk about it verses 9 and 10, the manifestation of authentic love, look we know what God's love is from these verses right here. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." This is the visible indication in our experience of the hidden love of God, the messianic mission of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us never talk about the love of God if we do not include within it the apostolic definition of terms. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." Now, look at those terms, only begotten Son, sent his Son, only begotten, his only- and well-loved Son. His Isaac, just like Abraham's Isaac was offered up. So God the Father, his Isaac, the second person of the divine trinity the Lord Jesus Christ offered up, truly offered up for the sins of sinners. God sent no prophet. He sent no angel. He sent no common servant. He sent his Son.

Now, mind you he does not say that he created his Son and sent him. He says simply he sent his Son. And the very fact that he sent his Son suggests that the Son was already in existence. He sent his Son. In other words, we can argue from this the divine preexistence of the Son of God. And no doubt, implied is his full deity. God sent his Son. The initiative is the Lord God's. It is not that men cried out, "O God, do something for us." As a matter of fact, all men, including you and you, are just like Adam and Eve in the garden. Once sin has entered the garden Adam and Eve are hiding from the Lord God. That's our everyday activity until we come to know the Lord God.

That's why when I was attending college and I had two friends who were taking Classical Greek with me and I was not a Christian, and I know that they studied in one particular part of the

library, that's why I went in that library and almost unconsciously took a look around to see where they were and went somewhere else. Because both of those men, incidentally, both wound up in the ministry, both of those men were rather fervent Christians and they would speak about their faith in Christ. So like Adam and Eve, I tried to find my fig leaves and hid in the corner of the library where I wouldn't come into contact with them and have a chance conversation with them in which something spiritual might come in. I was more interested in Sam Sneed and various other golfers, which at that time were on our newspaper in the sports page everyday.

"God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him," now mind you, that's what he says, "and this is manifested the love of God toward us." So when we talk about the love of God we're not talking about sentimentality. We're not talking about having sweet thought concerning the Lord God. We're not even talking about sitting down in our chairs and reflecting on God and having these mystical thoughts of God's greatness and the sentimentality associated with that, we're talking about the hard activity of loving one another and that's not all that easy.

"God has sent his only begotten Son," he uses a tense which suggests the incarnation is the first step but the mission is not completed. It's permanent commission that the Lord Jesus Christ is carrying out. So, "and this is manifested the love of God toward us because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." "Live through him," in other words we're all dead. He sent his Son that we might live through him. We are those who do not know the love of God, can only love if we've been born again, and furthermore we're dead because he said that we might live. If we have not been born again we are spiritually dead. Oh, we are living. We know what's going on. We can read the newspapers. We have friends. We even have a business. But we are spiritually dead. A relationship with God does not exist. I know that. You who are believers, you know that too. We need spiritual life.

Now, this is the unfolding of the eternal being of God. If you want to know what the love of God is, take a good look at this. This is simply the reflection of the eternal heart of God. Love has its origin in the bosom of God and only there.

Ellen Waddell wrote a biography of Peter Lombard and in it she was likening the eternity of God to a tree cut down in a forest. And you've seen a tree cut down and you've gone over, and looked at the stump, and you've looked at the rings around it indicating its age. And she comments about on the fact that you would never know the age of a tree or know the rings there unless it is cut down like that because the bark covers it. But once the tree is cut down then you have, so to speak, a history of the past of that tree.

And then she goes on to say, "The cross of Jesus Christ is like the stump." It unfolds a history, a history of the eternal love of God. It had no beginning. God did not some day in the past become a loving God, he always was such but in time a stump was seen, the tree was cut down, and we looked through the cross of Calvary and saw the manifestation of the eternal love of God. That's what he means when he says, "and this is manifested the love of God toward us because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." Live through him and live eternally.

The authentic love is emphasized again in the tenth verse, "Herein is love." Someone has said this is the great eureka. I have found it. Was it ten to twelve years ago everybody had a little bumper sticker that said, "I have found it." And that was a means by which some spoke about the Lord Jesus Christ. Others came out with bumper stickers like, "I never lost it," or things like this, you know. But I have found it, eureka, eureka we say. This is the great eureka,

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, (in the original text stress on that pronoun,) not that we loved God, but that he (again stress on the pronoun he) loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (Climactic action, free, uncaused, spontaneous, the love of God.)

Again, as I say not because we begged for some manifestation of his love, no he initiated this. We would have been happy if nothing had ever happened. Leave us in our sins, that's where

we want to be. Were it not of the love of God in the gift of the Holy Spirit who has brought conviction to our hearts and caused us by his grace to desire deliverance from the bondage of our sins. So we didn't love him first, he loved us first. And if we love him it's the result of his grace. He sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. So the Lord Jesus Christ, my Christian friend and my non-Christian friend, the Lord Jesus Christ in his mission and in his ministry is God's love taking voice and shape in our society. That is God's love. God loved us.

Again, a reference to the work of the cross, "He sent his Son and he sent him to be the propitiation." We talked about that in chapter 2 and verse 2, he pardons our sins at his own cost, it was a penal sacrifice for offenders who deserved punishment and he did it by substituting himself, taking the judgment of God for us and making it possible for us to have eternal life.

We don't talk about love as over against holiness. This is a holy love. That is it's a love that meets our needs by dying for us, by taking our judgment to us, the judgment that a holy God must meet out to sinners. Christ has taken it for sinners and eternal life is offered through him.

James Denney has made some very significant statement in his ministry. I love many of them that he has said. He says, "So far from finding any kind of contrast between love and propitiation as so many do, the apostle can convey no idea of love to anyone except by pointing to the propitiation. Love is what has manifested there. He can give no account of the propitiation but by saying, 'Behold what manner of love.'" For him to say, 'God is love,'" please get this, "for him to say, 'God is love,' is exactly the same as to say, 'God has in his Son made atonement for the sin of the world.' That's to say God is love."

One commentator has said, "If the propitiatory death of Jesus is eliminated from the love of God it might be unfair to say that the love of God is robbed of all meaning but is certainly robbed of its apostolic meaning. It has no longer that meaning which goes deeper than sin, sorrow, and death. So to realize that Christ has offered himself a sacrifice for our sins, a penal substitutionary sacrifice for us, our representative through whom we have life is to recognize the love of God.

John Owen said, "We are never nearer Christ than when we find ourself lost in holy amazement at his unspeakable love. When we get down by the side of our bed or by our chairs, or whenever we offer up prayer to the Lord God and we reflect in holy amazement at his unspeakable love, his eternal love that gave his Son for me, you have a right to say for me, that's when you are nearest the Lord Jesus Christ. May God help each one of you in this room to have many such moments in your life.

About five years ago I read a little book on the atonement by James Stalker. It's just a little book and it's not really a great book but in it he had an interesting comment. When he was younger Professor Stalker studied with Professor Dorner of Germany and he made a striking comment about Dorner underlining historical holiness of the divine love, that is there must be a sacrifice at the heart of the love, a payment for sin.

Professor Stalker said, "I have heard the late Professor Dorner say with a blush, half indignation, half shame on his sensitive face and amidst the death like silence in his classroom that a love which gives itself an utterly and absolutely away without respect to anything even to character is the love not of God but of a harlot." And even a harlot asks for payment. He didn't say that I said that. So when we talk about the love of God, my friend, we're talking about a love that has paid the infinite cost that sinners might be saved.

Well, the last two verses express the obligation and the issue of love. Moralists often puzzle over how an "is" can become an "ought". But if one reflects a little bit more deeply about the love of God everything that God does is expressive of his nature and his will. And thus if he loves and loves sacrificially you may expect the children of God who possess his nature to also love sacrificially and truly. That's what John is saying. He's saying, look if you are a child of God you have his nature within you. You're going to have to express what you have become, what you say you've become in the kind of activity that characterizes your father. This is simple as that isn't it? Difficult though that may be.

"Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us." And when you see a Christian brother loving another Christian brother or sister, truly loving, truly loving in the sense of the Scriptures then you have seen God in that individual. That's what he means. So we in the Chapel have a great responsibility. We make great professions but have to remember that if we truly belong to the Lord God we have to see, we have to really see in the lives of the saints of God, some expression, some manifestation of the sacrificial love of the eternal God. The obligation is grounded in his nature and in its origin, it comes from God, this love, this must is the must of inward constraint it's not external compulsion. We don't have to show the love of God because brother or sister so and so expects it or that the elders do. It's something that must come from within. That's what John means. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." It's not because someone else expects it of us but it's because having the love of God it will inevitably manifest itself in that way. That's the test of our love.

Do we meet the test? Do we need to get down on our knees some more and ask God in his grace? Maybe we need to get saved. Maybe we need to become Christians. For those of us who are Christians, we too, we may need to get down upon our knees and ask God to in his grace make us a fruitful missionary for him. In the Christmas season let us love but let us not forget that his love is a holy love. No shallow sentimentality, no wimpishness, so characteristic of the world. It's an atoning love. Not only the manger is our object of affection but the cross and it's a saving love. True religion, true religion is found in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the holy love of the brethren. That, I think, would summarize what the apostle is trying to say. Thomas Watson once said, "Faith deals with the invisibles, but God hates that love which is invisible."

If you are here today and you've never believed in Christ, of course, you don't have this love. In fact, you may have thought that this has been very boring because you don't understand anything. And, of course, it may be boring anyway. I grab that. [Laughter] But it may be boring simply

because you have no concept of what it means to be a child of God, no concept of your need, no concept of you sin before God, no recognition of that.

But if God has touched your heart a bit and if you realized that there's something lacking and you would like to have the joy of eternal life, and come to understand more deeply the love of God then it very simply may be yours as you bow your head before the Lord God. We cannot do it for you. A church cannot do it for you. An individual cannot do it for you. If you bow your head before the Lord God and say, "Lord, I recognize that I'm a sinner and I have needs. I hear Christ died for sinners and I surely am one. And Lord, if you're offering the gift of eternal life as the apostles say, I'd like to have it. I receive Christ as my personal Savior."

May God in his grace enable you to do that. Then the understanding of biblical love will have its beginning in your life and I hope also its manifestation in your life. Let's stand for the benediction and as we stand those that need to make that decision, now is the perfect time to do so. Let's bow together in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the Apostle John, for the boldness and the courage with which he ministered to his day. We recognize that for his faith he became an exile on that little island in the Aegean Sea, but we thank Thee that by Thy grace he has given us literature that will live eternally.

O God, if there are those in this audience who have not yet believed in Christ, may at this very moment they be lifting their hearts to Thee and giving Thee thanks for the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners. And for those of us who have known the Lord but who perhaps have not lived up to the apostle's exhortations.