

Mercy Hill Church

1 John • God the Father • 1 john 4:7-12 • No Date

Main Point

To have a relationship with God, we must understand that He reveals Himself through His love.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

In one sentence, who is God?

Why did you answer the question the way that you did?

How do we know who God is? What makes a Christian description of God different from what other religions might say?

If we hope to have a relationship with God the Father, we must understand that He reveals Himself to us through His love. The greatest display of God's love for us is found in the cross of Christ. When we understand the love of God displayed on calvary, we will begin loving each other self-sacrificially.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

If someone asked you to explain the Trinity to them in a sentence or two, what would you say?

In his book, Knowing God, J. I. Packer wrote, "The evangelical world has virtually become a world of unitarianism." Unitarians do not believe in the Trinity. In other words, evangelicals might say they believe in the Trinity but their faith in the Trinity doesn't really affect the way they live. Do you think that is true? Why or why not?

Do you think Christians today talk about the Trinity very often? Why or why not?

Perhaps the reason that Christians today do not speak a lot about the Trinity is because we don't really understand it. The Trinity is one of the most difficult and most controversial truths of the Christian faith. It is also, however, one of the most essential. In short, the Trinity teaches us that God is one and yet three persons. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all co-equal and co-eternal. Each is God and yet each is distinct in its person and work. If we hope to grow in our relationship with God, we must get to know God as He

reveals Himself to us in the three persons of the Trinity. Today, we will look at how God reveals Himself to us in the person of the Father.

| Have a volunteer read 1 John 4:7-12.

Compare and contrast God's love with human love.

What do we learn about God's love by considering that God sent His only Son into the world (v. 9)?

In his book, *Communion with God*, John Owen said, "God's love is like the sun, always the same in its light, though cloud may sometimes hide it. Our love is like the moon. Sometimes it is full. Sometimes it is only a thin crescent." Our love waivers based on how others treat us and respond to us. God's love remains constant no matter how we respond to it. God's love is not contingent on our performance as Christians. His love is free. God loves because He is love (v. 8).

Why does John emphasize that love cannot be properly understood through the lens of our love for God (v. 10)?

If our salvation were based upon our love for God, could we ever be certain of our salvation?

How is Jesus the "propitiation for our sins" (see 2 Corinthians 5:21)? In what sense is this a loving act?

What does the fact that God "sent" Jesus to be the "propitiation for our sins" tell us about the relationship of the Father to the Son? What does it tell us about their roles and purposes?

If salvation were based upon our love for God, we could never be certain of our salvation because our love is fickle. We can be sure of our salvation because God freely offers us His love and begins a relationship with us by His own initiative.

Christians often talk about their sin being forgiven on the cross, but we often fall short of considering exactly how Jesus accomplished our salvation on the cross. When we do not stop to consider such questions, we are unlikely to understand the relationship between the Father and the Son and how that relationship accomplished our salvation. The word "propitiation" (*hilasmos*) literally means "a sacrifice that bears God's wrath and turns it into favor." Thus, when Jesus was on the cross He was taking the punishment that we deserve for sin. When Jesus died on the cross, He said, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). When Jesus was on the cross, God was punishing Him for our sins and Jesus was submitting Himself to the Father's will so that our sins might be forgiven (Luke 22:42). The Father and the Son's roles in our salvation are distinct but their goal was the same: to glorify God by saving sinners like us.

Are you ever tempted to think that God doesn't love you? What makes you feel that way?

Read Romans 5:8. How does Jesus' sacrifice on the cross demonstrate God's love for us?

Read 1 Peter 3:18, according to this verse, why did Jesus suffer for sins? What did His death on the cross accomplish for us?

Our sinful nature encourages us to base our personal worth on our performance in life. Yet in dying on the cross for our sins while we were still sinners, Jesus demonstrates that our performance had nothing to do with the salvation He accomplished for us. God's love for us is based completely in His character and is not contingent on how well we live our lives. Because Jesus died for us when we did not deserve His love, we can be confident that God loves us and will always love us no matter what.

Jesus' death on the cross not only cleanses our sins, but Peter tells us that it restores us to God. The great reward of the gospel is God Himself. Jesus made a once for all sacrifice for sins that "He might bring us to God." Through the death and resurrection of Christ, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit worked to forgive our sins, overcome the curse of the fall, and restore the relationship for which we were created—our relationship with God.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Why isn't it enough to merely know that God loves us? Why must we consider the manner in which God demonstrates His love for us through the sacrifice of His Son?

God showed His love for us by sending His Son to be the sacrifice for our sins. What insight does this give us into how God expects us to show love to others?

What happens to our efforts to love each other if those efforts aren't connected to the Father's love for us?

Pray

Thank God for revealing Himself to us in three persons. Ask God to help you understand how the persons of the Trinity are distinct in person and yet one in being.

Commentary

| 1 John 4:7-12

4:7. This is the third and final time John appeals to the subject of brotherly love. He first mentioned it in 2:7-11, where it is given as an indicator of one who is walking in the light. The second occurrence comes in 3:11-24) and is mentioned as evidence that one is a child of God. "Dear friends" introduces a new subject,

and it reestablishes warmth and affection following a very pointed and direct discussion. He loves them and will now challenge them to love others as well.

John's exhortation is for Christians to love Christians, although the importance of loving non-Christians is not to be excluded. The basis for this love is God and His love; in fact, it is because love is from God. Love flows from or out of God and has God as its source. Not only is this true of God, but all who love have been born of God. In other words, inasmuch as anyone has even the smallest capacity to love, this comes by the grace of God. John is referring to a particular kind of love that is found only in those who have been regenerated by Christ. The perfect tense of "born" would include the initial rebirth of Christians and the continuing effects this would have in their life, and the present tense of "know" emphasizes that Christians are continuing to grow in knowledge of God. In other words, it is not the Christian's ability to love that causes the new birth, but his ability to love flows from his regeneration in Christ.

4:8-9. John turns from the positive expression of truth to its negative expression. He adds emphasis to the point in v. 7 by stating the converse. Those who do not love do not know God. The absence of love in the life of an individual proves that he does not know God. The one who does not love is a stranger to God. He never even began to have a relationship with God; that is, there was never a time when this person could have legitimately claimed that he knew God. The reason this is true is because God is love. John has already stated that God is Spirit (John 4:24) and that God is light (1 John 1:5), and now he gives one more encompassing statement regarding the nature of God. In this context John is saying that to know the love of God is to manifest His love. Without this manifestation one could not possibly know, or ever have known, God or His love.

Because His very nature is love, mercy and goodness flow from God like a beautiful river, as sunlight radiates from the sun. Love has its ultimate source and origin in God. It is not an abstract concept but concrete action, as John will now explain. John states that believers are to love, first, because love is the very nature of the God (v. 8) to whom they belong and of whom they are partakers and, second (v. 9), because of the incredible manner in which God's love was displayed. The sentence structure accentuates the nature and uniqueness of Christ. God sent His Son. The corresponding noun is typically rendered "apostle" and indicates one who is sent on a mission with a purpose, as a representative of another. This purpose is that we might live through Him. Life through and in the Son is a subject that greatly interests John. He refers to it no fewer than six times in vv. 9-16. The perfect tense of "sent" emphasizes the permanent consequences of this act. The verb "live" implies that those to whom the Son was sent were in a condition of spiritual death, and His mission was to impart life to them. This life only occurs through Him since He is the true and only mediating agent between God and man (see 1 Tim. 2:5).

4:10. The purpose in sending the Son is not the incarnation but the atonement—God sent His Son to die. Further, God's love is primary, not ours. The death of Christ is extolled, not the birth. John, in concluding the verse with the phrase "our sin," is keenly aware of his own need as well as ours for this propitiatory act. Our

act was to sin. God's was to love and send. Man in his natural condition does not love God nor His Son whom He sent. But clearly and amazingly, God loved us. And what incredible and unfathomable love it is: He sent His Son, and He sent Him to die for us. Love is always demonstrated by actions. It is not abstract; it is never complacent or static.

John has already given the purpose for this demonstration of love: (1) to take away our sins (1 John 3:5) and (2) to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). This marvelous act was prompted not by man's love for God but God's love for man. Left to ourselves, we would not love Him. We would hate Him and oppose Him. It took His boundless, sacrificial love to break our hearts of stone and bring us to Himself.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in Him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like Him. 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.

4:11. John now builds on his original admonition to love one another (v. 7). For the sixth time He uses this compassionate and affectionate greeting "Dear friends" to exhort his readers. John is not so much introducing a new subject as he is adding to his prior discussion. Once one begins to understand the incredible price paid for sin and the magnitude of personal sin, he will understand the love of God and demonstrate it himself (John 13:31-35). The love God has shown becomes the motive for our responding to others properly. John is insisting that loving God and loving others cannot be divorced, which is exactly what Jesus taught in Matt 22:37-40. John is writing to those who are recipients of God's love. Since God has loved them in this way, they have no option but to do the same.

4:12. John used the phrase, "no one has ever seen God" to refer to God the Father in His heavenly splendor, but God the Son makes the invisible Father clearly known (John 1:18).