Love Supplied Within the Body of Christ

1 John 4:7-12

- Over the last several weeks we've been discussing the ***Greatest of These*** which Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 13 is love.
- We've used an example of a watershed which receives water and then supplies that water to other bodies of water: "We receive, we enjoy, and we supply the love of God in Christ unto the glory of God.
- Up to this point we've talked about what receiving and enjoying the love of God looks like in our lives. That it is really a miracle where God awakens our heart, soul, mind, removes the obstacles of our sin and unbelief, and He does this through Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit, and we now have this freeing love relationship with God that we can be assured of where we are to continue to grow as we enjoy Him and behold Him and in enjoying and beholding – glorify Him daily in all things.
- **Mt. 22:37-40** – we started this series looking at an impossible command that only God can make possible through us being born again. That we are to "love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength" – EVERYTHING. Jesus said this is the first and greatest commandment. He went on to say this, "and a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." We now move into what it looks like (having received, and having enjoyed) to supply God's love to others.
    - **Leviticus 19** – Jesus is quoting Lev. 19:18. Moses tells God's people to love their neighbor, but he directs that command toward the people of Israel, God's family. However, later in the chapter Moses speaks of the foreigner (which would be someone outside of the family of God because Israel was a nation under God) and they were to love those outside the family of God as well. This week we are going to first look at what love within the family of God looks like. Next week we're going to look at love for those outside of the family of God.
- **The title of my message is "Love supplied within the body of Christ":** Up to this point, we haven't talked much at all about us loving others. There is a very important God-centered, God glorifying reason for that. ***We are not the cause of love, rather, God commands us to be conduits of love.*** God is the cause and the giver, we are the recipients, and when we love others we are simply spilling over what God has first given to us. Therefore, God receives the glory for it all.

John the apostle of love: John the apostle writes a lot about the love of God, in fact he is called the "apostle of love". John writes that we are to "love one another" as Christ loved us (Jn. 13:34). John shows that to Jesus love for one another was the real proof that we are truly His disciples (Jn. 13:35). The theme of "oneness" or "unity" is a very common theme for John in his gospel and his letters. He constantly records statements of Jesus speaking of the oneness between Him and the Father. In John 10:30 - Jesus tells us that He and the Father are one. In John 10:38 Jesus says that He is in the Father and the Father is in Him. John 14:8 – "whoever has seen me has seen the Father".

Over and over John emphasizes statements by Jesus that He does the works of the Father, and knows the Father, the Father sent Him, is pleased with Him, and that He is in the Father, and the Father is

in Him. His opening verses to his gospel speak of the unity and the diversity of the Father and the Son: "***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*" – John 1:1**. The Word, Jesus, was ***with*** God, and ***was*** God. Jesus and the Father are one and Jesus and the Father are two diverse persons. This unity and diversity within the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is something that John stresses. Here is the shocking thing – This unity and love within the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) - Jesus prays to the Father that this unity and love would be realized within the family of God…

> **"*I in them and you in me*, that they may become *perfectly one*, *so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me*." – John 17:23**

To John, there is no problem seeing God as *one* and yet *diverse*, and he applies that *unity* and *diversity* to the church. We are not one as the Trinity is one, nor do we love as the Trinity loves, but the analogy is applied by John to stress that we are *diverse* and *united* as God Himself is – Jesus is praying for the mission of God to be realized in the church. To John, the idea of a church that is divided or doesn't love one another, as God Himself is united and perfect in love, is an impossible and foreign concept. In other words, our unity and love for one another is rooted in the very BEING OF GOD HIMSELF.

Conclusion*: You cannot be one with God without being one with the church*! You cannot be IN CHRIST without being IN THE BODY OF CHRIST. You cannot be loved by God and not love the church. The love and unity we have for one another is the desired outcome of God's mission in sending forth His Trinitarian love into the world. The idea of an individualized or independent relationship with God apart from the church – "I don't need to go to church, I have my own ***personal relationship*** with God." - is a FOREIGN CONCEPT to John's understanding in his writings (as well as Paul and most importantly, Jesus).

If we don't demonstrate God's unity and love within the body of Christ, God's mission to spread His love to the world will not be realized.

- Richard Bauckham – The mission of God's love: "***begins in the mutual loving communions of the Father and the Son,"*** and it ***"entails the Son's mission to include humans in that divine love,"*** and it ***"creates the loving community of disciples of Jesus,"*** , that's the church, "***and thereby reaches the world."***, that's the Great Commission.
- Another way of saying that: "We receive, we enjoy, and we supply the love of God in Christ TO THE WORLD AROUND US unto the glory of God". God to the church, and the church to the world – that's how the love of God is spread in this world.

1 John: In 1 John, John is writing about what it looks like to be *born of God* (litmus test or spiritual check-up – eyes, ears, reflexes, etc.): Three tests – 1) they will believe the right things – right doctrine; 2) They will practice the right things – right practice; 3) They will love God and love the body of Christ. John's writing is very direct, and terse. He is very black and white. Part of the reason for this is because there were false teachers attacking the church and John is combating their heresy – so he doesn't pull punches and he is to the point. He says things like, you are either a child of God, or a child of the devil. You are either walking in light, or in darkness. You either love God's people, or you are not born of God. In our day and age, John would be received as "closed-minded" or "narrow" or "harsh"…but John knows that truth is very black and white and John loves the church and wants to protect the church from heresy that is like a poison that will kill the church. To John, to say that you are born of God, but you don't love

the church is a lie! You are deceiving yourself, or perhaps deceiving the church, which is why he wrote this so that the church could spot out the heretics in their midst.

Now in this passage John gives the heart of his theology regarding love. Let's read the passage again:

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. [8] Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. [9] In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. [10] In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. [11] Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. [12] No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us." – 1 John 4:7-12

"Love within the family of God is…three things"

1. Love within the family of God is…*a divine expression of God Himself*

- **"God is love" (v.8 also v.16)** – Love is something that is essential to the very nature of God. The logic is simple: If God is love, and you are born of God, then you will be a loving person. Notice he doesn't say, "love is God" – we don't deify love – we say that God is love. To say that God is love is to say that love is at the very center of His eternal, Trinitarian attributes – Father, Son, Holy Spirit. God is eternal, and God is eternally loving, because God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - No other "monotheistic" religion can say this as effectively. God is both *eternal* and *love*, because if God is one but not three persons, God cannot be eternally love before creation because there was no one to love. Who did God love prior to the creation of the angels and mankind? You might say, God is eternal, but He wasn't always love, He began to love at creation – well then God isn't immutable, He is changing and there was a time when God was not love. We say that God is eternal, *and* God is love, because God has always loved – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. LOVE from God is NOT PRIMARILY ABOUT YOU…it's who God is. He doesn't need us in any way to be in perfect loving relationship within Himself.
- **"No one has ever seen God" (v.12) –** We can see God in the person of Jesus Christ. But God the Father cannot be seen. However, when we love one another – it's heaven on earth. The implication is that we CAN see God when we as a church love one another, it is an earthly experience of God Himself, because God is love. ***When we love one another – God is in our midst.***
- **"if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us" (v.12) -** John is not saying that God's love BECOMES perfect, as though His love is lacking until we love. Nor is John saying that we become perfect through loving – as though love is a means to some status of sinless perfection. The word for "perfected" can also be translated "completed". John is saying that the mission of the Triune God spilling over His love onto the world is completed, or ***brought to its desired missional outcome***, ***when we receive, enjoy, and then supply the love of God to one another***. God's mission of love poured out onto the world is realized when the church loves one another! Love within the family of God is a divine expression of God Himself.

2. Love within the family of God is…*first received, then supplied*

- **"Beloved" (v.7,11)** – notice the title that John gives to the church – "Beloved". This is our identity – no matter what others may say, no matter what you might even tell yourself. If you are born of God, you are one who is loved by God. There is an integral relationship between being and doing. We so often focus on what we are to DO as Christians, God's word focuses more on who we ARE. If we are those who are loved, loving others will come very naturally.
- **"because love is from God" (v.7)** – later in this chapter John will say, "that we love Him BECAUSE He first loved us". Here John is saying "let us love"….BECAUSE love is from God." The command to love is in response to who we are. God is the source, we are the recipients.
- **"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world" (v.9)** – "His only Son" shows that Jesus is not "a" son of God, but the one and only unique Son of God. Fully man, fully God, the unique Son of God. The One whom the Father has loved and always will love for all eternity – He sent His Son, and the Son willingly came to demonstrate their love to the world.
- **"In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (v.10)** – God's love is demonstrated in Christ dying for sin as a "*propitiation*" for sin. His blood shed on the cross satisfies the just wrath of God that was against you. God's love is best displayed by Jesus Christ, the one and only unique Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, condescending to become a man to die a torturous death as your substitute so that you might know and experience the same oneness and love that the Father and Son and Spirit have experienced for all eternity. ***He literally died for the opportunity to show you and include you into His love! We have received this love…now we need to be willing to love one another as God has loved us.***
    - **Have you received this love?** Maybe you're here this morning and you have not yet trusted in Christ and received His love. You can do that now…by simply putting your faith in Christ, turning away from your sin, and receiving this glorious love of God. It only takes faith – trust in Christ now for salvation.
    - **Incarnational love –** He became a man - what ways can you enter into the muck and mess of others in order to love them as Christ has loved you?
    - **Giving love –** He limited Himself, He took the form of a slave – loving others means being willing to go the extra mile, give up some of your "rights", your "time", your "resources". This is what Jesus did for you.
    - **Dying love –** He was obedient to the Father to the point of death. How can you obey God in the body of Christ, the church? What ways would God have you to live out the "love one anothers" in humble obedience to Him?

3. Love within the family of God is…*not optional it's a divine obligation*

- Loving the body of Christ is NOT a spectator sport
- **"let us love one another." (v.7) "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (v.11)** – this is a command, it's not optional. We are to actively be loving the church family. Interestingly, John includes himself in this command. "let US love one another." Loving one another is a divine obligation.
- "**Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love" (v.8)** – One commentator writes: "*to fail here, 4:8 asserts, is not merely to fail ethically; it is to fail in the*

whole matter of salvation." (Yarborough, BECNT, 236). Again, John's aim in this letter is to separate those who are born of God and those who are not born of God.

Summary: When the church fulfills the mandate to "love one another", it is a divine expression of the love of God Himself. The mission of God to spread His love and His glory to the world cannot be realized unless the church loves one another. This love is first received as His beloved child, and then it is supplied to the world in gospel mission. The true child of God will receive and supply the love of God within the body of Christ. To say that you are a child of God but to not be a part of God's mission to spread His love, first within the church, and then to the world around us is to deceive yourself and others.

As we come to a close, there are three things that you have received from God – we are to steward them well, and we will give an account for how well we stewarded what God has given us…

Time, treasures, and talents - We are meant to be those who receive, enjoy, and supply all that God has lovingly and graciously given to us. God has given each of us ***time*** – 24 hours every day to be precise. He has given us ***treasures*** – resources and money that we are to use to support the body of Christ. He has given us ***talents*** – spiritual gifts and abilities that we are to use to build up and love one another. We are to be conduits of our time, treasures, and talents.

Your Time - James 4:13-15 – ***"Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"— [14] yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. [15] Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."*** - instead of saying, "This is what I am going to do tomorrow, next week, this summer." Start saying, "God how do you want me to use my time?" It is a gift given to us by God.

Your Treasures - 2 Cor. 9:10-11 - ***He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. [11] You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. –*** Paul is talking about financial giving. Notice that God will faithfully pour into our lives as we faithfully give of our resources. But He does this so that "you will be enriched….to be generous." This isn't giving for God to make you rich (prosperity gospel). This is giving faithfully, and God will in return "enrich you in every way" SO THAT you can give more. ***Giving is an upward trend***. Just start somewhere, don't worry about the amount, just be faithful and consistent with what you are able. Really all of our time, talents, and treasures work like that. God increases His supply of time, treasures, and talents as we faithfully supply what He has given.

Your talents – Rom. 12:4-6 – "For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, [5] so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. [6] ***Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them*** – One of the greatest displays of unity and diversity WITHIN THE CHURCH is the way that we are all wired to serve. As each member of the Trinity has a job to do, each member of the church has a job to do. ***Don't be a spectator in the church. According to Paul, there is no such thing as spectator Christians. If you are a Christian, you are a member of the body of Christ. God has given you a gift – USE IT – whether in this***

church or somewhere. But I believe God wants you to be committed to a local church and to use your gifts within that church. This isn't optional. If you don't know what your gifts are, here are a couple suggestions:

- **Take a spiritual gifts survey** – we have a link for you to go to. There is nothing more exciting than serving in an area where you are particularly gifted. We have LOTS of needs within the church here and we can find a place for you to serve…but we'd LOVE to connect you to a place where you are particularly gifted – where there is JOY in serving.
- **Start working, and start discovering** – I personally discovered what my gifts are by just plugging in wherever there were needs. I've taught kids, I've greeted, I've led small groups, I've done set up/tear down at church plants, I've counseled, I've been an elder, I've been an usher. I've always asked the question, "how can I serve?" Spiritual gifts surveys are great, but they are not as effective as discovering through trial and error where you particularly fit in. Start working, and start discovering. If you do nothing, you will dry up in your walk.
- **Be faithful with a little and God will give you more.** If you feel called to something specific, but God just isn't opening the doors, could it be that you first need to be faithful with the smaller things? There are a lot of people who want to be on stage, or lead a study, but they aren't willing to first pick up a wrapper off the floor. If you are serving the body of Christ, He will reward your faithfulness by blessing you with greater opportunities.

Closing illustration?

Pray