

- ***READ I John 4:8-16*** While love is a common theme throughout the entirety of Scripture, I don't believe there is a particular chapter of the Bible that deals more specifically with the subject of love than that of **I John 4**. In the eight verses that we just read, the word "love" is written for us twelve times. If we were to expand and count from **v.4-v.21**, we would find love mentioned 27 times. I don't know about you, but I think love might been a bit on the mind of John as he wrote this letter.
- But why such a strong focus on love? We understand and recognize from past studies that love is at the basis of everything God is about and everything that we should be about. Our motivation for our service and dedication to God is to be our love for Him. (**I Corinthians 13**) Likewise, God's love for us, what is good and what is right is what has motivated Him to do what He has done for us. In fact, God's love isn't just a part of His character, but it is truly who He is.
- Two times, in **v.8 & v.16**, we find what we might describe as one of the most famous bible one-liners that exists. In these two verses, John declares that God doesn't just love, but he declares that God is love. We have probably heard these three words time and time again throughout our lives. "God is love" is probably cross stitched on a pillow we have, or it might be written on a decoration that we might have in our homes. To know that "God is love" is certainly a comforting thought, but I wonder if we have ever actually given thought to recognize what it means that "God is love?" How does God's love play a part in our salvation and becoming a part of His people and kingdom?
- The truth is that I have seen people, at times, just throw around the fact that God is love in a very flippantly. Maybe they are confronted with an issue of something that they have done that is against God, but instead of repenting they just throw out, "well God is love so I'm good." Let's take some time this morning to consider what it means that God is love, to look at a couple of misconceptions, and then what else we need to recognize that God expects from us in this Text of **I John 4**. Let's begin by establishing the weight of God's love for us.

I. God's love is unconditional.

A. As God is eternal and everlasting, so is His love.

1. Again, notice in these verses that it doesn't just say that God loves, but it takes it a step further to say that "God is love." Love is of the very essence of the character of God. In other places throughout Scripture, we can find statements that also speak of the essence of God and who He is to His core.
 - a) "God is not man" (**Exodus 23:19**)
 - b) "God is spirit" (**John 4:24**)
 - c) "God is faithful" (**I Corinthians 1:9**)
 - d) "God is light" (**I John 1:5**)
2. These points of consideration of things that make God who He is. It isn't just that He chooses to do things things, but they are who He is at His very core, and in the same way as He is spirit or light... God is love. That love that He is is unconditional and everlasting just as He is unconditional and everlasting. Nothing started or can end the God of heaven, and His love is just the same.

B. His unconditional love has been exemplified through His offering of forgiveness and salvation through Jesus to sinful man.

1. We all know the words from even when we were small children. "**For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.**" (**John 3:16**) These words speak to the degree of God's love for us. God always wants what is best for us, but I think we truly come to understand the unconditional nature of God's love for us in the letter to the Romans.
2. Consider the fact that God could love us and give us His Son because we were a people worthy of such. Maybe we were a people trying to be righteous, and we just needed a little help. That certainly could've been what pushed God to give His Son for us, but Paul tells us in **Romans 5:5-11** that even "while we were enemies" of God, He was willing to extend the lifeline of salvation through Jesus Christ. God's love wasn't shown to us because we deserved it, but it was shown to us because His love for us remains even when we flat out reject Him. Just as God will never be diminished, neither will His love for us ever fade.

II. Common misconceptions of God's unconditional love:

- A. While it is very true that God's love is unconditional, never ceasing, and never changing...we must recognize that with these truths comes some misconceptions and false conclusions that some individuals will come to. Here are two that I want to make specific mention of.
- B. *"God loves me and accepts me no matter what."*
1. In considering the love of God, we must not allow our conceptions of what love is to distort the true unconditional love of God. We have talked in times past about the notion that some hold on to that true love demands approval or at the very least acceptance. This is the idea that is forced upon us by those who seek to rationalize and promote same-sex marriage. Their wisdom tells them that if we don't accept and approve of them then we must hate them.
 2. This type of thinking has crept into the minds of some people when they think of God's love for us. Their idea of God's love is shaped by the thinking that love and acceptance are the same thing. If I love someone then I accept them no matter what is what they believe is true about people, so it must be true about God, as well.
 3. Well...I think we see pretty clearly the fallacy of this type of reasoning. Firstly, love and acceptance are not synonymous terms. I can very easily love someone while hating or despising something they have done. My love for them doesn't mean that I will just accept anything they do. In fact, my love for them will lead me to want them to only do those things that are good and right! If they're doing something that is wrong or harmful then my love ought to push me to try to stop them. This is true for me as a person, and this is what is true of God, as well. Yes, God does love me, and He loves everyone. However, His love for us doesn't mean that He will approve and accept us no matter what we do.
- C. *"God loves me and won't send me to hell."*
1. Yet, someone will maybe even take it a step further and say something to this effect. They won't talk about acceptance, but they will really try to add some shock value to the statement by mentioning that God's love won't allow Him to send anyone to hell. To the average person, this can make some logical sense. After all, God loves us, wants what is best for us, and will bless us, right? If this is true...then how could a loving God send people to hell?
 2. The reality of this kind of statement is that it is made as an attempt to use emotions to dictate our reasoning. In our minds, again like love and acceptance, we equate love with reward and never punishment. A loving God wouldn't punish those that He loves, right? We want to have this true of God, but this isn't even true of ourselves. Those of us who are parents...we love our children, right? Of course we do, but does that mean that we never punish them? If they do something wrong, especially after being repeatedly warned of the consequences of such...they get punished. This is a common sense fact. God operates in the same way. He has always been straight forward with us when He tells us that obedience will result in reward and disobedience will result in punishment.
 3. God does want us to be saved, and He shows it through His love and patience (**II Peter 3:9**), but at the same time I believe that passages such as **I Corinthians 6:9,10** put a pretty good end to any of this nonsense that makes the claim that God's love demands acceptance and will not allow Him to punish anyone.
 4. Yes, God's love is unconditional. Yes, God always wants what is best for us, but that doesn't mean that He doesn't expect anything else from us in order to be in fellowship with Him and experience the best this life has to offer by being a child of His. (**I John 1**) Let's conclude the lesson by considering three things that God demands from us.

III. God's unconditional love does not negate His demands:

- A. God is love, but He still demands truth. (**I John 4:1**)
1. We're going to spend the remainder of our study back here in **I John 4**. In this chapter, we see John detailing the love of God, but also showing us what God expects of those who claim to be a part of His people, the church. Notice to begin with, those who seek to be in fellowship with God must be a people who are dedicated to truth. (**I John 4:1**)

2. The big lie of the day during the writing of this letter is that Jesus wasn't actually God. It is believed by many that the gnostic teachers were claiming that the Jesus who walked in Galilee wasn't actually the Son of God. They claimed He was just a man.
 3. John calls these false teachers out, and also calls out anyone who would be willing to go along with this falsehood or any other falsehood that might be put forth. Yes, God is love and He loves us, but He, through John, demands that we must be a people who hold fast to truth. Whatever is true, we are to be about. **(Philippians 4:8)** If God is all about the truth, then it is logical to understand that we must be about the truth if we want to be a part of His people and His kingdom.
- B. God is love, but He still demands confession.
1. Secondly, notice a specific truth that we must adhere to if we want to be people of God. That truth is that *"Jesus Christ has come in the flesh and is from God."* **(vv.2,3)** Remember, this was one of the chief issues that the earliest Christians were having to face, and it was something they truly had to be convinced of as being true.
 2. The implications for them and for us today are endless. If Jesus was not God then He must be a liar and no liar is worthy of the love and devotion that Jesus demands as the Savior of mankind. However, if Jesus truly is from God and of God then we must be willing to confess Him as such and allow this truth to dictate the way we live our lives.
 3. Because the truth is that our willingness to confess Jesus as Lord will determine whether or not we are of the family of God or if we are of the spirit of the antichrist that is spoken of in **v.3**. It determines where we are of *"the spirit of truth"* or if we are of *"the spirit of error."* **(v.6)** If we want to be of the same number as the Apostles, then we must confess Jesus as Lord and allow that fact to influence our way of living. Yes, God loves me! He sent Jesus to die so that I might be saved, but that doesn't mean that I can deny the Lord and still reap the benefits of God's love. I must confess Jesus, so that God's love can benefit me in the greatest way. **(vv.14,15)**
- C. God is love, but He still demands that we love.
1. Finally, yes God does love me unconditionally, but His love is only perfected in us when we love one another. **(v.11,12)** A refusal to love our fellow man as ourselves will result in us not knowing God **(v.8)**, and a failure to know God is a failure to truly know His unconditional love for us.
 2. On the other hand, our willingness to love others as God loves us leads us to be filled with a confidence that nothing else can bring us. On the day of judgement, those who know God will be able to stand before Him with great confidence knowing that the great blessing of salvation that was given by His love for us will finally be truly and fully experienced. **(v.17)**
 3. God's love for us is to serve as our example of the love we ought to have for one another. It is man's nature to hate those who hate him, but remember that God loved us even when we were unlovable and enemies of His. So too we are to love even those who might hate us and wish and hope for the best for them. Yes, God is love and He loves me, but I must take that love and show it towards all other people. It isn't feasible for me to love God who I haven't seen and hate my brother who I see everyday. **(vv.20,21)**
 4. But might I add that it isn't just that I love my neighbor, but I must also love God to the extent that I keep His commands. I can't say that I love God if I continually rebel against His will in my life. **(I John 5:1-3)** Yes, God is love, but He still demands that I love Him and my fellow man.

Is God love? I believe we would all respond with a resounding yes and many "amen"s. But I hope we have all come to be reminded this morning that just because God is love doesn't mean that we don't have any sort of responsibility laid upon us concerning how we are to live this life. May God's love continue to be abundantly evident to us, and may we allow this love to motivate us to live for Him and to love Him and others in the same way that He first loved us. ***PRAYER***