

## "How Great Is the Love of the Father"

1 John 3:1-24

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Greetings! One of the more amazing developments in the medical field over the last 30-40 years has been surgical procedures that transplant or replace certain organs or body parts. Knees and hips are regularly being replaced these days. Kidneys, livers, and even heart transplants have become commonplace – it's truly remarkable. The underlying issue behind all these procedures is that the problem parts were either defective from birth or became defective due to the wear and tear of life. Something that wasn't working as it should, needed to be changed out – transplanted with something that does work. The hoped-for result of this procedure is a better quality of life – free of the debilitating effects of something that wasn't operating as it should.

Now you're probably wondering why in the world am I talking about transplants and replacements and what do they have to do with today's reading. I believe the message of this chapter, this Epistle, and virtually all of the Apostle John's writings is for us to receive, believe, and trust the love of God.

As evidence of this claim, I give you the opening line of today's reading. 1 John 3:1a: "See what great love the Father has lavished on us." Personally, I like the NKJV of this verse better, where it starts with the word "Behold." John is imploring us to take a step back and truly think and reflect upon the Father's love for us. So, I attempted to do just that – I tried to dwell upon God the Father's love for me, and to be completely honest, I couldn't do it. I really can't take in, absorb, grasp the love of the Father. I had to ask myself, "Why?" I came up with 2 reasons

1. Being His creation – being finite, it is impossible for me to fully understand my Creator – the Infinite One. The Creator is always greater than the creation, so the creation cannot totally know the Creator.
2. Because of the love I have learned through my own *human* experiences is, by its nature, flawed and sin-based, it is impossible for me to comprehend the love of the Father – the agape love – the love of God which is perfect and holy.

Having come to these realizations, God revealed to me something that I never really understood before preparing for this lecture. Accepting the gift of His mercy, forgiveness, and salvation is acknowledging the birth defects and the wear and tear on **my** understanding of love. In other words, stepping forth in faith and following Jesus is, in effect, agreeing to Him performing a love transplant.

As each of us reflects on our lives, we probably can recall those people, those actions, those events that were sources of our learning to understand love – what it looks like and how it feels. For some, these are comparatively good memories. For others, though, learning experiences of love were very painful – abuse, neglect, and/or

a total absence. For me, I grew up in a family where love was conditional – based on performance. It was lacking in passion and honesty. Now, do I believe my parents loved me? Yes. But knowingly or unknowingly, the love they offered was rooted in a world understanding of love – lacking any concept of God’s way of love. Painful love learning experiences are bad enough by themselves, but the problem gets bigger as we bring these experiences into our adult relationships as spouses and parents. Without getting a love transplant from the Great Physician, we are infecting those whom are most dear to us– delivering a damaged love.

Because this is a Bible study, I try to refrain from using secular examples to make a point, but I believe there’s a good quote from an old wise one – it fits with what I’m talking about. Of course, I’m speaking of that great Jedi Master, Yoda. In the Jedi training of young Luke Skywalker, Yoda is teaching him the ways of “the force.” Yoda knows that Luke doesn’t understand what it means to walk as a Jedi and understanding the force because he has lived his life void of this knowledge. He reaches a critical point in the teaching and then looks deep into Luke’s eyes and says, “You must unlearn what you have learned.” This is the essence of the Apostle John’s proclamation for us to “Behold the great love the Father has lavished on us.” The Father’s love is so different, so powerful, so life-changing that it can’t be equated to a human’s understanding of love. We need God to help us **unlearn** the damaged comprehension of love we all are born with and are subjected to – that is why we need Him to give us a love transplant.

The Apostle Paul warned us about being unequally yoked with unbelievers in chapter 6 of 2 Corinthians. This is especially true when it comes to the one of the most important love relationships we can/will have – the marriage – to be equally yoked. Jesus said in the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of John in verse 44, “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” Jesus is speaking to unbelievers here. If what he says is true for these unbelievers then, it is true for unbelievers today. Keeping this concept of an unbeliever having the devil as his/her father, it’s been said that for the Christian who chooses to marry a non-Christian, you better be aware of your Father-in-law.

Getting back to the text, John gets right to the immediate blessing of the Father lavishing His love on us. 1 John 3:1b: “that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” Along with the marriage relationship, the parent/child relationship should be one of the most powerful love relationships we’ll ever experience as human beings. Again, for many of us, the relationships we had or have with our parents was not what we had hoped it would be or is. As a result, this statement that those who confess Jesus as their Savior and Lord may be called children of God may not mean nearly as much as it should. That is why we all need a love transplant.

John doesn't say when we get to heaven we'll be God's child – he tells us in verse 2 that "NOW" we are children of God. I want you all to just stop and now say out loud with me, "I am a child of God." I am convinced the "change agent" for every one of us – the truth that truly sets us free – that releases us from all the burdens, all the anger, all the hurt, all the guilt, and all the shame – is the acceptance of the truth that we are totally and completely loved by God. He IS our Father. We ARE His children.

John confirms the mystery of God's love to an unbelieving world in the last part of the first verse of today's reading 1 John 3:1c: The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Do you see the theme? Jesus is God, and God is love. His love is unrecognizable to the unbeliever – those who haven't received a love transplant. This is why we become strange to unbelievers – they don't know us because they neither know the love we are being loved **by** nor know the love we love **with**. It's foreign to them because they only understand how the world loves. Our identity is with the King whose Kingdom is not of this world. Does that mean they can't know us or Jesus? Of course not – we were in their shoes at one point in our lives. That is what our assignment is when Jesus tells us to love one another – to give an example to an unbelieving world what Godly love looks like.

1 John 3:2: "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Do you ever wonder what John is alluding to in the second verse? "What will we be has not yet been made known?" What are we going to be like? We really don't know – do we? However, John offers this wonderful promise that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him. We may not know what we will be, but Jesus does. He sees in us **now** – as His child - what He **will make** out of us. So don't be discouraged where you are today – the author and finisher of your faith – knows what He is going to make out of you – and it is going to be like Him. And we will see Him as He is – the conquering all loving, all powerful King of Kings and Lord of Lords – I can't wait.

As we begin to receive: 1) the blessing of a love transplant from God; 2) the truth that we are His children; and, 3) the hope that we will one day be like Him, it should produce something in us. Verse 3 tells us it should be purity – a desire to be holy. Why? If we're to be like Him, what does Scripture tell us about what He is like? Leviticus 20:26: "You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own." Children are a reflection of their parents, so we as Christians are reflections of our Father. Therefore, we need to surrender our wills to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to help us live a more holy life. The Apostle Paul exhorted us to do this in Romans 12:1, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."

In the first 3 verses, John tells us that those of us who confess Jesus as Lord ARE children of God. From there, he begins to define **who a child of God is and who is not**. As it has been from the Garden of Eden – the defining issue between those in fellowship with God and those who are not is the presence of sin. In verse 4, the Greek translation of this verse is speaking of someone who habitually, blatantly, and continuously practices sin. He then tells us in verse 5 the first of three reasons why Jesus was manifested. First, He would **take away** our sins. The Greek word for take is “airo” which literally means to lift – to take up or away. Remember what John the Baptist said in the first chapter of John’s gospel? John 1:29b, “Look, the Lamb of God, **who takes away** the sin of the world!” In the Old Testament, sins were **covered** by the blood of the sacrificial lamb. As subsequent sins were committed, new sacrifices needed to be made to cover those up. In Jesus, our sins are lifted, taken up, and taken away from us – this is a better sacrifice.

I would imagine verse 6 caused quite a bit of conversation in your groups. This is a really important point that we need to understand. A person who is truly a child of God is born again and has the Holy Spirit dwelling in him/her. We are given a new nature – one that is rooted **in** and directed **by** God. God and sin are mutually exclusive – that means they cannot coexist. Therefore, someone who is truly a born-again Christian, **when** he/she is living in the Spirit cannot sin and will not sin. Unfortunately, until we go home to heaven, we must also walk this Earth with our old nature still in tow. A pastor once said that becoming a Christian “ruins sin”. Another one has said that a Christian who is habitually sinning is probably the most miserable person.

Peter and Paul each spoke about the battle of the two natures – both of these men, flawed in their own ways, spoke of this conflict between God’s nature and our old nature as if it is a war.

1 Peter 2:11, “Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.”

Romans 7:22-23, “For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.”

If we’re honest, each of us can relate to this ongoing battle. We’re all going to sin – the issue John is emphasizing here is that if you’re continuing in your sin and it’s not eating you up, you’re likely not truly a child of God. If you are a child of God and are in sin, you are likely a very unhappy individual. You have the power of God residing in you to overcome this sin – but it starts with your confession. Do it – you’ll feel the burden come off as Jesus lifts off and takes away the sin.

In verse 7 and the first half of verse 8, John identifies the behavior of one who is living with the Spirit of God guiding his/her way – the fruit of that living is doing what is

right – the reflection of a righteous God abiding in him/her. Conversely, the one who is continuously sinning is under the spell of the devil – he is the source of all sin – always has been and always will be until he's thrown in the lake of fire by Jesus. We learned in verse 5 that Jesus was manifest to take away sin. Here in 1 John 3:8b, we see the second reason, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." Jon Courson said, "In taking away our sin, Jesus paid the price for sin. In destroying the works of the devil, He destroyed the power of sin."

He's right – this is what a loving God does – He takes away that which has burdened us, and he destroys that which can tempt us. Who is doing all the work in this relationship? God! And we must remember that the reason we have the relationship with God is that we're born again by His Holy Spirit, which is given to us as a seal of our redemption upon our confession of Jesus as our Lord and Savior. John again emphasizes the Spirit indwelt and driven child of God cannot continue in habitual sin because that holy nature cannot be at peace with the presence of sin. What we need to recognize and draw on is that if we do sin, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and will give us the power to overcome the old nature.

Ultimately, it is up to God to determine the true conversion in each one of us. However, there should be signs that distinguish the child of God and the child of the devil. John makes that point here in verse 10 – he's speaking to our actions – he uses the word "does" which is an action word. Does also implies an intentional action with a hoped-for benefit. What is that benefit? Jesus said in chapter 15 verse 2 of John's gospel, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." He wants us to bear fruit. Why? "Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them." (Matthew 7:20) We are recognized as His children when we reflect His love upon both believer and unbeliever. We bring God glory when we bear fruit. However, we can only do this when we allow our born-again holy nature to overwhelm our old sin-based nature. John 15:5: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." And Jesus reminds us that we can't bear fruit on our own – it must come from Him.

In 1 John 3:11, John then narrows the focus of what our fruit should be as children of God. He is merely echoing the commandment Jesus gave after the Last Supper in chapter 13, verse 34 of John's gospel, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." Notice the words Jesus used **before** giving the commandment, "As I have loved you." We need to constantly remind ourselves that our relationship with Christ is solely due to the fact that He first loved us. There is nothing we have done, can do, or will do that warrants His love for us.

Isaiah plainly states in chapter 64, verse 6 the value of our old nature-driven attempts at righteousness – they are like filthy rags. This is not to make anyone feel that we're not worthy of salvation. Jesus Christ crucified should permanently dispel that lie. A cornerstone of our faith should be the understanding that we didn't do anything to warrant God's love – we were made out of His love - to be loved by Him - and to love others with His love.

In verse 13, John again echoes the teaching of Jesus by telling us that we shouldn't be surprised that the world hates us. Jesus had a lot to say about this topic, and it's interesting to see how He develops this truth that is true for us today.

- John 7:7: "The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that its works are evil." He begins by making it clear that the hatred people have for us began with the hatred they had for Him. Why? Because He called them out for what they were – what we all are – sinners.
- John 15:18: "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first." Jesus then begins to let them know that the world may indeed hate them – but it will be because of their choice to identify with the One who was hated first.
- John 15:19: "If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you." The Lord then begins to define the battle lines of the Kingdom of God – which is ruled and reigned by love, and the world which is ruled and reigned by Satan – the father of lies and the source of sin. As we've said before, these two worlds cannot coexist, and Satan's issues are with God and His kingdom. He hates God, so He is going to hate anyone who chooses to identify themselves with God.
- Luke 6:22: "Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man." Finally, Jesus offers this curious statement – that we'll be blessed for being hated because of our choosing to live for the Son of Man. We may not see that blessing now or ever on Earth, but Scripture is clear that there will be rewards for shining God's light on this dark world.

In chapter 3 verses 14-15, John continues to distinguish between the true believer from the unbeliever. Here he zeroes in on how we get along with each other – whether or not we love each other. I shared with my group in last week's lesson regarding a memory I had of the evidence of Christian love. Back in the 90s, some of you may remember a movement called Promise Keepers. This was a nationwide effort to unite men into becoming keepers of their commitments to God, their marriages, and their families. There was a unifying force in this movement, and it was the presence of

the love of God – giving men of all walks of life the power to love each other and better love those in their lives.

John draws the line as clear as he can when he tells us if we do not love, we remain in death. Notice the link to love and life and hate and death. They're each eternal partners. He then equates hate to murder. This may sound extreme, but remember what Jesus said about anger and murder in Matthew 5:21-22a: "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment." Sin begins in the mind – in our old nature. If we allow it to remain in our mind, it will turn into death for someone – likely many. Maybe not physical death, but emotional death is inevitable.

1 John 3:16: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters." With the first half of verse 16, John offers the definition of God's love – Christ laying down His life for us. In the second half of this verse, He implores us to share that love with our brothers and sisters. He goes on to give an example of what showing God's love should look like in verses 17-18 – giving to someone in need. It shouldn't take much effort to see people in need these days. Maybe it's not material possessions. Maybe it's friendship or companionship. Maybe it's a shoulder to cry on. Maybe it's someone in need of encouragement.

When we get that love transplant, we're not to keep it to ourselves – it should compel us to share it with others. Our old nature doesn't want to do that, but the essence of God's character – which is love – is to make it available to everyone. This is an important point – we can do nothing on our own – no works – to be saved. That is His free grace gift. However, we can and should do works once we are saved to perfect our faith.

James 2:21-22: "Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did." Now Abraham's belief, or faith, in the promises God made to him was what made him righteous. But the **proof** of his belief and faith in God was the works he was prepared to do to his son Isaac. James tells us that faith and actions work together, and faith is made complete in the actions – or the works. So, it is with love. We receive this love transplant for one purpose – to glorify God. We glorify God by loving Him and loving others through our actions.

Next, John introduces the heart into the picture. The heart is a tenuous thing. Jeremiah said in his book in 17:9: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?" John talks about how our hearts can be at rest when we're in His presence. Have you felt that rest? I must confess I have not felt that

as much as I feel I should given it's a clear promise to God's children – those who know they belong to the truth. John offers the reason why I don't feel that rest – because my heart condemns me.

I can recite over and over Romans 8:1 about how there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, but I still feel the condemnation anyway from time to time. It is the last half of verse 20 that I really must memorize – God is greater than our hearts and knows everything. I want you all to think about that for a moment. Whatever you think you're hiding from God – stop it. He already knows. Do you think you can't override your heart and the thoughts and emotions that run through you day in and day out? Well, you can't – but God can because He is greater than your heart. Will you let Him?

Verse 22, is a widely abused verse by the "name it and claim it" people. "God so loves me He will give me anything I ask – I just have to have faith!" Now I won't debate that the greater our faith the greater the relationship we will have with God. However, people need to remember the second half of this verse – "because we keep His commands and do what pleases Him." The world's idea of love is, "I deserve it because I'm me – give it to me – I'm entitled." Can God just keep giving us anything we ask? Yes. Will He? Not likely.

We all need to remember that God is sovereign – that means He can do whatever He wants, whenever He wants, and to whom He wants. I've come to peace with this because sovereignty that is rooted in agape love has got to be better than anything I can come up with on my own. What are the commands that John is speaking of in verse 23? "...to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us." We're to believe in the God of love and then, by His Spirit, love others as He would. If we do that, we can have confidence before God. John completes this chapter with the assurance that if we believe in the name of Jesus and love others - we are living in Him, and He lives in us. We know this because the Spirit that lives in us confirms it.

I began this lesson with the notion that we are all in need of a love transplant. As I thought about how this would work, I envision the Father coming up with the idea of the need of a love transplant, Jesus performing the surgery and His tool is the cross and His Word, and the Holy Spirit applying the anti-rejection medicine of truth and power. I don't have it in me to love the way God wants me to love – just ask my wife. But I do want to, and I need to allow the power of the Spirit to overcome my concepts of being loved and loving others and follow His lead as to how to love as God does.

I'm from Missouri – which is known as the "Show Me" state, and I do find it helpful to have an example to follow. That example, for me, is Jesus. So, the question that needs to be asked is what is it about the Father's love that enabled and enables Jesus to live the way He did and does? I found four things:



1. **To Know the Father:** Matthew 11:27: "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."
2. **To Respect the Father:** John 5:19: Jesus gave them this answer: "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."
3. **To Trust the Father:** Mark 14:36: "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."
4. **Know the Father Loved Him:** John 3:35: The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands.

Because Jesus was so secure in the Father's love for Him by knowing, respecting, and trusting Him, it allowed Him to live in complete freedom to do exactly what the Father told Him to do. He didn't have to worry about a single problem, a single adversity, or any circumstance whatsoever because He was absolutely certain that regardless of the effects of these issues on Him, they paled in the face of the Father's love for Him. There was one exception, though – in the Garden of Gethsemane when He was sweating blood as He was about to enter the horrible last 12-18 hours of His life. We've all heard how horrifically He was treated – beaten, scourged, and crucified. However, I don't believe that was what He was sweating blood over.

Personally, I believe the source of His fear was the knowledge there would be a time where He would be separated from His Father. The thought of not being in the constant loving attentive care of His Father while He represented yours and my sin on the cross was almost more than He could handle. Can you imagine that kind of love? Having such devotion, such trust, such assurance of the depth of the Father's love that being separated for just a short while would cause you to fall to your knees and sweat blood? I want that kind of love. Do you? Here's the really good news. We do have it as promised in John 17:26 by Jesus Himself, "And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare *it*; that **the love with which You loved Me may be in them**, and I in them." Jesus is telling us that the love the Father has for Him is the same love that He offers each of us. That's why we're here every one – to come to know, respect, and trust God's love for us. Look at the security and power it gave Jesus and what He was able to accomplish with it. Imagine what it will do for you – if you really believe it. Will you? Let's pray.