

## Real Love – God and you      1 John 4:7-8

February is the month of love. Parked in the middle of the month is a day set aside to recognize and celebrate love. For some people this day causes more heartache than it does elation. As you know, Valentine's Day has become like all the other holidays we celebrate, in that its commercialization is more important than its original intent. It's more about the profit margin than the sentiment. Just to give you an idea of what I'm talking about, I want to share some statistics with you about this day of love.

- According to NRF, the National Retail Foundation, American's spend approximately \$20 billion dollars each year expressing their "love" towards a significant other.
- Men spend more than twice as much as women. For instance, the average a man spends on a woman is \$231. Ladies only spent \$100 on their man. Come on ladies, you all are slacking. Guys, at least we are doing better at Valentines than we are in other areas.
- When we break this down into products purchased or event types, we see the following in relation to the spending.
  - 54% of all Americans will purchase candy as a sign of their love.
  - 44% will give a greeting card.
  - 36% will send flowers.
  - 41% will stay at home for a special evening as compared to 22% who prefer a night out.
  - 18%, mostly men, will purchase jewelry during this time.
- Now, when we look at who, or what people spend money on for Valentine's Day, we see:
  - 54% spend on their spouse or significant other.
  - 17% spend on other family members.
  - 7% is spent on our friends.
  - 6% is spent on our kids.
  - 6% is spent on pets. That means about \$1.2 billion dollars, on pets, for valentines.

Now, I know you didn't come to church this morning to hear the preacher recite a bunch of useless information to you about Valentine's Day. But there is a method to my madness. I want you to take note of how man has taken something originally intended by God to be special and blessed, and meaningful, and has turned it into something artificial, often manufactured and exploited for commercial gain. I'm not talking about Valentine's Day. I'm referring to "love". Mankind has distorted the true meaning of love and as a result created a systemic belief that love is purely physical in nature. Love can be experienced without any form of emotional or spiritual connection. What the world is saying is, "love" is something on the surface, and nothing more than a temporary moment shared between individuals.

This month, during the month of love, we are going to work our way through a new series, a series I'm calling: **Real Love**. My hope is that as we go through this series, you will have a new appreciation for love and that this new appreciation will help you understand how it is that God loves you. How it is that Jesus loves you. How it is that fellow believers are supposed to love you. And, how it is that you are supposed to love others.

To begin, we need to understand love as God defines it and as God demonstrates it. You see, love is a tremendous gift from God and is the basis behind our creation in the first place. Without the true and authentic character and nature of God's love, there would be no viable explanation for our existence. I'm sure most everyone here today has heard that "God is Love". God is a lot of things, and it is very true that He is Love. How can I know this and how can I substantiate such a statement? First, I need to know where the statement originates. Let's look together at **1 John 4:7-8**.

God is love, but wouldn't I need a definition for love to better understand such a statement? Absolutely! But let's not look to our, or should I say mankind's definition because I think it's obvious just how skewed our understanding of love has become. Instead, let's lean into the basis for our faith and go directly to the source. How does the Bible define love? Perhaps the most recognizable place in all of scripture to find a definition for love can be found in Paul's teaching on the subject in chapter 13 of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians. In fact, many consider these verses the explanation of perfect love. Let's look together at verse 4-8a because this is where we find God's inspired definition. **Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a**. The Spirit of God taught Paul about this very important characteristic and used him to explain it for us. If I asked you to name some characteristics of God, you would begin by listing things like holy, righteous, just, vengeful, merciful, gracious, etc. What we need to understand concerning all the attributes of God, including love, is that each of them exists in perfect harmony together and give us intimate details into the His persona. The cool thing about love, while it works harmoniously with the other attributes, it also serves as the core quality behind all the others. In other words, God is merciful because of His love. He is gracious because of His love. He is just because of His love. Love exudes out of His holiness and His righteousness. The converse thought here is, If we believe that God is love, then we must also believe that He cannot be unloving.

When we trust this truth then we can also know how important we are in the eyes of our creator. He created us "in His own image" for the purpose of being in relationship with Him. He will always choose you. No matter who the real you is, He will always seek you and offer you an opportunity. But will you always choose Him? In fact, if God were not love, then we would never be able to express real love towards anyone else. A Creator filled with perfect love chose to make us, knowing that we would rebel and not reciprocate with the same love. But even with this knowledge, He did it anyway. I want to remind you of **Genesis 1:26** this morning because in its words, you'll discover that every person, not just the Christian, is made in the likeness of God. *"Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."* The original Hebrew text, as translated directly to English, reads this way, *"let us make man in us, image of, according to, us likeness of."* Since we're not here for a Hebrew lesson, I just want to note; when I read this, I infer that every person was created to be part of the relationship that exists between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And while we cannot achieve God-like status, we are allowed to experience and express His communicable characteristics and attributes, but only if we choose to love Him back. If we choose to believe in and love Jesus as our Savior and our Lord.

I've said this before. God doesn't want to force us into a relationship with Him. He doesn't want little copycat robots roaming around filled with an imitation love that is so readily defined by the world's standards. People who authentically choose God, do so because of His love, and it's His love that's found at the core of an eternal relationship with Him. The greatest expression of this agape love, this unconditional love is explained for us in two passages of the NT. First, from Jesus in **John 3:16-18**. *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."* Then summed for us by Paul in **Romans 5:8**. *"but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* God knew man would originally choose sin, but He made us a way out. Thank you, God, for the gift of Jesus!

Here are the things I hope you garner from today's message:

1. God is LOVE; and therefore, He is incapable of being unloving.
2. God expresses His unconditional love to us in a variety of ways. A few of those include:
  - a. Through our creation – **Read Colossians 1:16**
  - b. Through His Son – **Read 1 Peter 1:8-9**
  - c. Through salvation – **Read Ephesians 2:8-9**
3. God will always choose you. God's ear is always listening for your voice. **Read Romans 10:13**

Will today be the day you choose Him. Will you call upon the name of the Lord and be saved?