

GOD IS LOVE

TEXT: 1 John 4:7-21

Have you ever thought about what it would be like to be God? The Bible tells us that God is Love. Not that God can be loving, but that God *is* Love. The Bible says that God created us with love, and for love. But it didn't take long for God to discover that there was a problem with God's creation: humans were hard to love, and they didn't do well with returning God's love. It wasn't that they didn't want love – they did. But, it was difficult to love them, for them to receive love or to give it back in return

Goodness knows, God tried. God blessed the people; God answered their prayers; God did miracles for them. But the people still rejected God, did what they were told not to do and they were very ungrateful. God invited them into a deeper relationship with him. The people just turned away.

So, what is there about God's love that we don't seem to understand? Well, we tend to go back to the Old Testament and declare that we can't seem to love a fearsome God whose nature and character seem to be inconsistent and contradictory. That God sends God's wrath on those who stray from God's directions and guidance. Well, a quick reading of the Old Testament does say this. But our reading from 1st John seems to be talking about a whole different God. This got me to thinking. Christians are prone to say that God never changes. But I challenge that thought. The Bible is very clear about the unchanging nature of God, so how can we reconcile that? Perhaps it is our conception of God that needs changing.

The God of the New Testament is clearly a God of love. No doubt about it. But does that mean God is nothing but an indulgent, doting, grandfatherly figure? On the other hand, the God of the old covenant is anything *but* the relentlessly bad-tempered taskmaster some people make God out to be. The Old Testament Scriptures are forever describing God as “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy”. As a matter of fact, most biblical scholars agree that God's love and God's judgment are

actually two sides of the same coin. Fire can burn. Fire can also provide warmth and comfort. It depends on where we stand in relationship to the flame. *Both* Testaments reflect this truth, each in its own way.

The very idea of the God of the Old and New Testaments being different from one another comes from a critical misunderstanding of what God's wrath really is. God's wrath is God's mercy. Believe it or not, it is love. Deuteronomy tells us that our God is the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love him and keep His commandments. Just as any parent chastises the misbehaving child, God corrects God's children with justice and mercy. From the very beginning we learn that God created the world and all that is in it in his image and in love.

The Bible is a story, and like any story, it has a plot that is constantly progressing. It is a tale of God's love for God's creations, of God teaching us how to best live in a way that will result in our ultimate good. Whether God is being wrathful or comforting, angry or loving, God's goal has always been the same, and will always remain the same –to save God's people, to bring them into the relationship they were created to be in, and to grant them peace and happiness for all eternity.

That is the true nature of God, and the lens through which we might gain some understanding of the events of the Old Testament even in our New Testament world.

The Bible is not just another ancient book of human wisdom . It is God's word, given to tell humans how they can know God, how they can have a relationship with God. The central theme of the Bible is God's gracious way of salvation – God providing deliverance from sin and spiritual death through repentance and faith. In the Old Testament, the concept of salvation is rooted in Israel's deliverance from Egypt and the giving of the law in the book of Exodus. In the New Testament, salvation is accomplished through the death of Jesus Christ, his resurrection and ascension into heaven and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Throughout all of these accounts, God's love

for God's creation and God's continuing guidance for God's straying children demonstrate the ongoing theme of God's grace and unconditional love for all of God's children

Today's reading tells us that we should love one another, for love is of God. It goes on to say that those who do not love, do not know God, for God is love. So whether we read the Old Testament or the New, we know that God showers God's love on all God's children – for God is Love.

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A short time ago we lost one of God's children, some one who exemplified God's love for God's children, and his love for God. Jack Shrauger blessed the community and this church with his fertile, inquiring mind, and his generous willingness to share his thinking and his thirst for understanding. Over the years he was with us, he shared his wit and wisdom, encouraged questioning and thinking, and blessed us with his presence. Today we have an opportunity to share some memories and perhaps some special moments as we remember Jack. So I invite those of you who wish to do so to share your remembrances of his gracious life.