

# OpenTheo

## God of Love - Part 2

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### **The Bible for Today with John Stott - Premier**

John Stott shows us that if we have been born again we will manifest the nature of the God who has begotten us again and we should exhibit the love of the God we claim to know.

### **Transcript**

The love of God is not sloppy or soft or sentimental love. It's not untrinsable to love. It's not love that is prepared to condone evil or compromise with sin.

No, the love of God is the strong love of His holiness. Divine love is holy love, determined to redeem us in righteousness without compromising His righteousness whatever the cause. He commenced the Bible for today six months ago with one of the earliest known recordings of John Stott preaching at All Souls Church in London.

And in six months time, we'll bring you the last sermon he ever preached there. These messages are just a small chronological selection from a whole lifetime of preaching. And today at the halfway point, we'll hear a message John gave at All Souls in 1987.

You can listen to all of John Stott's sermons by visiting their website. Last week we saw from the first letter of the Apostle John that if we claim to know God, we should exhibit the love of God we claim to know. We saw the logic of what the Apostle was saying in both a positive and a negative way, positively by the way we show love and negatively because if we do not love, we do not know God.

This week John Stott continues with the subject of love and you'll find it helpful to have your Bible open near the end of the New Testament to the first chapter of John chapter four. So firstly, we are to love one another because God is love and love is derived from him. Look again, will you at verses seven and eight.

The love it let us love one another because love is of God and he who loves is born of God and knows God and he who does not love does not know God. So Christians are people who claim to have been born of God or begotten of God and who claim to know

God. New birth and the knowledge of God are integral to being a Christian.

But the God we claim to know and the God we say has begotten us again is love. It follows therefore that if we have been begotten of God, we will manifest the nature of the God who has begotten us again. Or again, if we claim to know God, we shall exhibit the love of the God we claim to know.

You see the logic of what John is saying. He puts it actually the same logic in two ways, both positive and negative. Positively he says everybody who loves has been born of God and knows God.

Negatively, whoever does not love does not know God. I hope we can feel within us the irresistible logic of those statements. Mind you, the love that he is talking about is not ordinary human love which binds together husband and wife, parent and child, brother and sister, friend and friend.

That kind of ordinary human love exists outside the Christian community and far beyond the community of those who have been born of God and know God. Because God has made all human beings in his own image and given all human beings a capacity to love and to be loved in that ordinary human sense. And Jesus made that clear in the Sermon on the Mount.

He said to his own followers, "If you only love those who love you, you'll know better than people outside the kingdom." People who are outside the redeemed community, they love those who love them. That kind of love is not restricted to those who are born of God and know God. But the implication is there is another kind of love that is.

It's not ordinary human love, it's divine love. It's the love of God. It's the love that stokes and sacrifices and serves looking for no reward.

It's the love that took Christ to the cross. It's the love of our enemies. That is divine love and is possible only to those who have been born of God to whom he has imparted some of his own nature.

So this love is the hallmark of genuine Christian men and women. Everybody who loves like that with the love of God has been born of God and knows God. And whoever does not love with a love like that, a love that reaches out to the enemy, such a person does not know God.

However much they may claim to, however orthodox they may be, however religious they may be. John says, "If they don't love with the love of God, they don't know him and they've never been born of him." It's a very solemn statement. So that's the first thing.

We ought to love one another because God is love and love comes from him and if we claim to know him and to have been born of him, then we must love as well. Then

secondly, we ought to love one another, he says, because God has loved us in Christ. John turns from doctrine.

God is love to history. God has loved. He turns from the being of God as love to the activity of God who has loved us in Christ.

Verse is 9 to 11. In this the love of God was made manifest that God sent his own Son into the world, that we might live through him. In this is love.

Not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins and beloved if God has loved us like that in giving his Son to die for us, we ought also to love one another. Well the words that are common to both statements and verses 9 and 10 is the other words that God sent his Son. He has shown his love for us in giving and sending his Son in order that we might live through him and in order that he might be the propitiation for our sins.

Now that shows us that the love of God is not sloppy or soft or sentimental love. It's not untrinsable to love. It's not love that is prepared to condone evil or compromise with sin.

No the love of God is the strong love of his holiness. Divine love is holy love, determined to redeem us in righteousness without compromising his righteousness whatever the cost. John tells us that the cost of God in loving us like that was very great indeed because in sending and giving his dear and only Son he first took our nature upon him and was born in the womb of a lowly mother and then to take our sin judgment upon him in God for second darkness.

And it's because he died that we may live. It's because he bore our sin that God has propitiated his own roof against evil. We must never think of Christ as coming between us and God and propitiating a reluctant God who wasn't willing to do it himself.

No that is absurd. The Bible never even begins to indicate that. The very opposite is said to us here that it is God in his own love who has propitiated his own roof by sending and giving his Son to die for a set is God in Christ propitiating his roof by his love.

That's the mystery of the atonement. The wonder that God loved us enough to bear our sin and guilt and judgment in his own innocent person. So the first argument for our loving one another is because God is love in his being and all love derives from him.

The second argument is that God has loved us in the historical process in giving himself by giving his Son to die for us. And the third in a way is even more striking. And that is that we ought to love one another because then if we do it is evident that God lives in us and that his love is perfected in us.

Now that I just spend the rest of our time looking at verse 12, nobody has ever seen God. But if we love one another God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. Nobody has

ever seen God.

God is invisible. All men and women have ever seen of God is his glory, the outward shining of his inward being. But the inward being of God is invisible.

Nobody has ever seen him and nobody ever will. And the invisibility of God is a great problem. It is a great problem to faith.

The invisibility of God is a problem to the Jews in our Testament days. The surrounding nations had visible gods, that is idols. Their gods had eyes and ears and noses and mouths and feet and hands.

But the Jews worshipped an invisible God which struck the pagans around them as a huge joke. And they used to tease the Jews about worshipping an invisible God. They came to them and said, "But you say you worship God.

Where is he?" We can't see him. Come to our temples and we will show you our gods. They've got noses and mouths and hands and feet and eyes and ears.

But you say you worship God. We can't see him. Ha ha ha.

And they laughed at the Jews for actually worshipping an invisible God. That's why several times in the Old Testament, a psalmist or a prophet will say, "Why should the nations say, 'Where is now your God?'" And that's why the Jews used to pray to God, "Rend the heavens, come down, show yourself, visit us, so that the heathen will know that you are God." So you see, the invisibility of God was a great problem to the Jews. But the invisibility of God is a great problem at the end of the 20th century as well in our scientific culture.

You and I were brought up in an atmosphere of healthy skepticism. We were taught the empirical method. We were told that we cannot believe in anything that is not amenable to investigation by our five senses.

We were told to believe in what we can see and hear, touch and taste and smell. And if there are certain things people say they believe in that are not accessible to the five senses, we were brought up not to believe in them in skepticism. So young people come to us to dance, "How can I believe in God?" I can't see him, hear him, taste him, touch him, smell him.

How can I believe in a God who is invisible and intangible and inaudible and everything else? So you see, the invisibility of God has always been a problem. So how has God solved the problem of his own invisibility? You know the answer to that question? In two ways, first in Jesus Christ, John 1, John's Gospel, chapter 1 verse 18, "Nobody has ever seen God, but the only begotten of the Father, he has made him known." And a few verses earlier, John 1, 14, "The Word became flesh. The eternal Word of God became a

human being, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." So Jesus was able to say a little bit later, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." And Paul could say that Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God.

Well, people say that's marvelous, it's marvelous, and it's absolutely true, it's logical, it's wonderful, the claim that the invisible God made himself visible in Jesus, the unknown God made himself known in Jesus. It's it's eminently reasonable. We could never have come to know God otherwise, it's wonderful, but it's 2,000 years ago.

Is there no way in which the invisible God makes himself visible today? Well, yes, there is, and this is John's second answer, this text, verse 12, "He begins with precisely the same words, the identical words nobody has ever seen God. But instead of going on the only begotten Son has made him known." He says, "If we love one another, God dwells in us, and his love is perfected in us." I think it's one of the most breathtaking verses in the New Testament, because it is a claim that the invisible God who once made himself visible in Christ now makes himself visible in Christians, in the Christian community, if, if it is a community of love. If we love one another, God dwells in us, and his love is perfected in us.

Well, it's one of the verses that we overlook regularly when we're talking about evangelism. You know, we cannot preach the gospel of the love of God if we don't embody in our community the love of God that we're talking about. This verse is crucial to the evangelization of the world.

People are never going to believe in our invisible God, even the one who made himself visible in Jesus. If he does not make himself visible in us today, it's a great challenge. We cannot preach the gospel with any degree of credibility or integrity if we do not look like what we're talking about.

Well, let me recapitulate and then just conclude for a moment. John has been deploying arguments as to why we should love one another, and they all have to do with the love of God. He began with doctrine that God is love and all love derives from him.

He went on with history that God so loved us to give his son to die for us, and he concluded with experience that God's love can actually live in us and come to perfection in us. And it's on those three foundations of the love of God that John bases his appeal to us to love one another. So what's the conclusion? Well, it's that the whole world is crying out for love, isn't it? Everybody knows that love is the greatest thing in the world.

Do you ever hear these words of Kagawa, the famous Japanese Christian in the 20s and 30s? "Ah, this famine of love." He wrote, "How it saddens my soul in city and country, hospital, and factory, shop and street everywhere, this dreadful drought of love, not a drop of love anywhere. The loveless land is more dreary than Sahara, more terrible than Gobi." And if it was true in Asia, in his opinion, indeed other parts of the world, it's

especially true in the West, where the technocracy is their hostile to human community and the authentic relationships of love, that's why Mother Teresa has written, "People today in the West are hungry for love, for understanding love, which is the only answer to loveless." And she says that we and the West have forgotten how to smile. We've forgotten the beauty of the human touch.

We've forgotten what is human love. We need people, she says, to love us. She finds what Kagawa found, which is the famine of love in the world.

The tragedy is that it's even in the church that is often an absence of love. One if you've ever read a little book called "Deceived" by Professor Mel White, who is an adjunct professor of full-athiological seminary, who has made a film of it as well, which is an investigation into the Jonestown tragedy, that mass suicide of a thousand of his followers in the Guyana jungle. You remember in 1978 or '09.

And he wanted Mel White wanted to investigate the causes of this appalling tragedy. How could it happen, he said? And how can we stop it from happening again? And as he talked to defectors and survivors, this is what he said. This is what he found.

Jim Jones' victims were from our churches, but they didn't find love there. Gene Mills, the defector after seven years, said, "I was so turned off in every church I went to because nobody cared." Grace Stone, whose lawyer husband, Tim, became the second most powerful person in the People's Temple, said, "I went to church till I was 18 years old and nobody ever befriended me." And the People's Temple in San Francisco, however, according to Gene Mills, "Everyone seemed so caring and loving. They hugged us, they met us welcome, they said they wanted us to come back." And it was that discovery that led Mel White at the end of his book to call his final chapter, "It must never happen again and to list eight resolutions of Christian people, of which the first is this, I will do my best to make my church a more loving community to our members and the strangers in our midst." The absence of love in the church, so I end on that note, as John would have said, if he were here, the apostle John, but love it, let us love one another.

Not just that we may attract outsiders into the fellowship and that they may see the invisible God in our love, but because God is love in his enamest being and because he has loved us in Christ, so that if we do not love one another, I claim to know God, which is the subject of all these sermons, I claim to know God is just a hollow mockery. We will remain silent for a moment or two in which to meditate on the love of God and on the challenge to love one another. We're conscious of people, we don't love people of whom were jealous, people concerning whom thoughts of hatred even or revenge arise in our hearts, then we need to repent and pray for grace to love one another, including our enamest.

Let us pray. We desire to worship you, heavenly Father, because you are love, and love derives from you. You created us in your own image with a capacity to love and to be

loved, and you have manifested your love in the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ.

We bless you for the cross as this supreme demonstration in history of your love. We ask you to forgive us for our lovelessness, and grant that we may fulfill this command of Jesus through his apostle John, that we love one another, give ourselves to one another, humble and loving service. We ask it for the glory of your great name.

Amen. You've been listening to The Conclusion of a Message by John Stott on How We Should Love Others, because of the way God has loved us through giving his Son, Jesus Christ. If you would like to discover more from the letters of the apostle John, you'll be interested in our book recommendation for this week by John Stott.

It's called The Letters of John, and you can find details by visiting our website, which is regularly updated with new material to mark John Stott's centenary. Just go to [premierchristenradio.com/chonstott](http://premierchristenradio.com/chonstott). The legacy of John Stott lives on and is growing, touching every level of society across the world. Today, Christian leaders throughout the majority world are being equipped to provide pastor training and resources in their own countries thanks to the vision of John Stott, who donated all his book royalties to support this ministry through Langham Partnership.

To find out about this and other ministries, John Stott founded, go to [premier.org.uk/JohnStott](http://premier.org.uk/JohnStott). Join us at the same time next week for more from The Bible for Today with John Stott.

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