

## Is It Enough to Say “I Love You”?

A sermon on 1 John 2:13-15

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Two questions for you to start off our sermon this morning. Number one, why do people usually get married? Well, usually, it's because they love each other, right? Question number two, why do people, today, usually get divorced? I think the reason I often hear is “because we've fallen out of love with each other.”

When I've done marriage counseling before, one of the points I drive home is what does it mean to love someone. I can't tell you how many people instinctively classify love as purely an emotion or a feeling. One second it's there, and the next it's gone. But that's not all that love is, wouldn't you agree? Isn't love an action? Doesn't love show itself as well?

Love shows itself when the husband runs to the store to buy flowers for his wife...or when he runs to the store to buy unmentionables for his wife. Love shows itself as the wife slaves over the hot stove all day to cook dinner for her hardworking man or as she spends days cleaning the entire house just so her husband can have the guys over to watch the game. You know, I think most married couples would quickly agree that it's not enough in a marriage to just say ‘I love you.’ You need to show it as well.

Today is our last Sunday of Pentecost, a season which focuses on our daily lives as believers. The relationship we share with God is a little different. It's more of a parent/child relationship, but doesn't the same rule apply regarding love?

As we finish out the season of Pentecost, what better way to end than to talk about what is behind the live you and I live as God's children. We live lives of love. But what does that mean? Is it enough to say to God, “I love you”?

I know you know the answer to that question. Of course not. It can't ever be enough to just want to say to God, “I love you.” Especially not after you read a letter like 1 John. If you remember our sermon last week, you might remember I had called 1 John a love letter, a letter all about God's incredible love.

You want to hear a couple passages from this love letter? Try this one, “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!” Or this, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.” Or this, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” Or this, “God is love.”

It's God's love letter to you. And now here, in our verses, God is making his request of you, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

Now, does that sound sort of like a paradox to you? A seeming contradiction from John? Because in John 3:16, John tells us that “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...” But now here, he's telling you and me, God doesn't want us to love the world. So God can love the world, but we shouldn't?!?! We can't?!?!

It all comes down to that word “world.” In John 3:16, you know what the ‘world’ is? It’s every human being. It’s you and me and every other person who has, who is, who will walk this earth. God loves us all so much he sent Jesus to die for our sins.

But here, “world” takes on a different meaning. “World” in this sense refers to the opposite of the values of heaven. John illustrates what he means with the term world by identifying three terrible “worldly” evils arising out of a sinful human heart: cravings, lust, and boasting, which we’ll talk about in a little bit.

Basically, God’s giving us an ultimatum here: either we love God or we love this world and all its sinful pleasures. Either you’re going to love God and show your love for God or else you’re going to love worldly evils. You can’t have both sides. You can’t straddle the fence.

You see, friends in Christ, we are dealing with a 1st Commandment issue here. You know the 1st Commandment, don’t you? “You shall have no other gods. What does this mean? We should fear, LOVE, and trust in God above all things.”

What does it mean to love God, to love God above all things? The Bible tells us, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.” Right there, that passage tells us love is so much more than just saying, “I love you, God.” Your heart, your soul, your mind, your entire body, your entire life, that’s what you ought to love God with. To put anything else above God, simply put, is idolatry.

Do you always love God? Well, let’s check ourselves against what John lists as not loving God...the worldly idols of “cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does.”

The cravings of sinful man...can you think of examples of this, from your own life? How the sinful nature urges you toward shortcuts to happiness in this life that in actuality leaves you anything but happy. Like drinking a little too much to fit in or to numb the pain of strained relationships or overbearing work or personal failures. Or the craving to feel accepted by your peers drives you to abandon faithful living as you indulge in gossip or lying or vulgar language. That’s not loving God.

And let’s not forget about one of the most dangerous cravings this sinful world offers today, the “lust of his eyes.” Let’s face it, people today, you and I today, want to feel loved and want to express their sexuality. But how the evil within us can twist those innocent desires into lust. Lust is the driving force behind adultery, marriage-wrecking, prostitution, pornography. All these promise fulfillment, but none delivers. They lead only to more addictions...more selfishness. How simple and how accessible the world makes objects of lust readily available to lead astray hearts and minds from what they should truly desire, godly living. That’s not loving God.

And then there’s the final idol, boasting. We all long for praise. But the sin within drives us to be too impatient to let other people figure out our good features at their own speed. So we hasten the process with boasting, forgetting that all our possessions and even our skills are gifts of God. “Look at how involved I am in the community, all the work I do for charity...or all the work I do for this church,” as if everyone should hoist you onto their shoulders and grovel at my feet because I’m such a good person.

But you see, boasting denies God's gifts, insults the giver, and inflates the braggart with nothing but conceited gas. That's not loving God.

And you could add to that list, maybe the idols you struggle with, like does Facebook trump devotions or reading God's Word? Does money for my new clothes become more important than money given to my over-generous God? Does going out to eat or that new movie or that sporting event get the nod over spending time showing love for God by serving him and helping out at church?

You realize, everything the world offers us is transitory. John tells us the world with its evil and selfish desires will pass away. We should be focused on loving God, but we often aren't. We're often focused on ourselves and our wants instead. That's not loving God. That's idolatry.

And here's what God has to say to that, "I am the LORD...I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols." In another place, God calls himself a "jealous God." He doesn't want to share you with an idol. He wants you all to himself. He wants you to love him and only him...and not just to say you love him, but to show your love for him... in how you think, how you speak, how you live your life.

And the sad reality is we don't. God often has an unrequited love. He shows nothing in this relationship but love to you and me and we don't always show it back. We might say we love him, but behind his back we cheat on him as we fall in love with this world and its sinful desires.

I'm sure many of you know how badly it stinks to tell someone you love them and then to not have them say it back. But in a sense, that's what we do with God. And for that, what do we deserve? For God to take away his love, not just for a little while, but for all eternity. And without God's love, that would be hell for all of us.

God knows it's not enough to just say, "I love you." You know what's interesting? Look through the entire Bible, and there is rarely a time where God says, "I love you."

Instead, look at how many times he shows how much he loves us. Like the passages from 1 John I used earlier, "God is love," "This is what love is: Jesus laid down his life for us," "This is true love, that God loves us and sent Jesus to die for us." And there's plenty more, like John 3:16. The book of Ephesians, "But because of his great love for us, God...made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions."

And then there's the section from Romans, "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Now, I've heard of parents who play this game with their children at bedtime, where the parent would say, "I love you from here to the moon!" The child would try to top that statement, like, "I love you to the moon and back." They go back and forth, trying to one-up each other until someone would finally say the ultimate phrase, "I love you...infinity!"

Imagine that were God. Imagine that were Jesus. Ask him how much he loves you. He answered, "This much." Then he stretched out his arms and died for you. That's true love. Jesus stretched out His arms so wicked people could nail Him to a cross even though he hadn't committed any sin, even though he had lived a perfect life. That's how much He loves us.

He stretched out His arms to take on the sins of the entire world, our sins of idolatry included. That's how much He loves us. He stretched out His arms so His blood could be spilled as a sacrifice, to wash away all our sins. That's how much He loves us. He stretched out His arms so we wouldn't have to, so we will never have to suffer the eternal consequence of our sins. That's how much He loves us. He showed his victory and our victory over death by rising from the grave. That's how much he loves us.

You see, it wasn't good enough for God to just say he loves us. He showed his love through Jesus. He's shown us unconditional love. We call it grace. It's grace because we can't earn God's love. We don't deserve it. It's unconditional because there's nothing we have to do for it. God gives his love to us, expecting nothing in return.

But can you be satisfied with doing nothing in return? I know I can't. And we don't want to just stop at merely saying thank you or even, "I love you, God." No, we love because God first loved us. We want to return God's love by the way we live for him every moment of every day of our lives. We show love by getting rid of those idols and instead living according to God's will, because, as John assures us, "the man who does the will of God lives forever."

God has shown some incredible love. You only need to take a look at your life. But God's love goes even beyond that to your salvation and your eternity. Now what about you? Is it enough to say to God, "I love you"? I hope for you, it will never be. We are children of God. We will never be satisfied with just saying, "I love you." We will constantly be striving to live our love for God and show our love to God because that is true love. Amen.