God is Love

God's love might be his last attribute that the world believes in. The idea clearly comes from the Bible: "God is love," says I John 4.8. We would do well to believe this wonderful truth and take it to heart, letting it affect our mindset and shape our lifestyle. However, if we believe in God's love without considering the rest of what the Bible says about him, we risk misunderstanding the amazing love of God. On a recent Sunday morning, we looked at I John 4.8-10 and examined what the Bible means when it says "God is love."

**God's Love is an Innate Love (I John 4.8)**

"God is love" is not a definition (as though God could be reduced to love), but it is a characteristic of God. This attribute, John teaches us, is true of who God is in himself. Nothing from the outside compels or leads God to love; he loves because he is a good and loving God. When we humans love, sometimes we say things like "I can't live without you" and "You mean everything to me." But a little reflection shows that God's love can't be like that. God loves without need, and this is a deeply refreshing thing to know, for we need a God who is big enough not to need us. If God's love for us depended on us, then we could (and would) lose his love. But (thank God!) his love depends on nothing but himself. He "sets his affection" on us as his people, not because of anything necessarily loveable in us, but because he is in his very nature love and has been—the Father, Son, and Spirit together—forever.

**God's Love is a Holy Love (I John 1.5)**

God loves us too much to leave us as we are. This is a bit counterintuitive to how our world thinks, for we tend to believe that love means to accept people as they are without any desire for them to be different. But here we would be wise to let Scripture challenge our view. "God is light and in him is no darkness at all." God cannot approve of or accept sin, and even as he extends his love to sinners like us, God will not change or set aside his standard in order to accept us. He accepts us for Jesus' sake (see the next point below) and then sets about the work of changing us to be like Jesus. Why doesn't God just allow us to be our sinful selves? He is just, and demands what is best. He is kind, and wants what is best. He is wise, and knows what is best.

**God's Love is a Giving Love (I John 4.9)**

This Good Friday, I hope we take time to consider the cross: the pain, the purpose, the love. There, as God the Father gave his Son to death as a sacrifice for our sin—there, as God the Son willingly bore our sin and the wrath of God that goes with it—there on the cross we see the love of God. "For God so loved the world," John writes elsewhere, "that he gave his one and only Son" (John 3.16). God does not love merely in "word or talk but in deed and in truth" (I John 3.18). Unlike the "gods" of the nations around Israel (and unlike the various competing loyalties seeking our support today), God gives.

**God's Love is a Leading Love (I John 4.10)**

"Sin is cosmic treason," explains R.C. Sproul. Those words are appropriately strong to describe the seriousness of our rebellion against God. And yet God demonstrated his love toward us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5.8). We find it easier to love those who love us back, but thankfully God didn't wait for that. If we look deep inside us, we'll realize what that would have meant. He would still be waiting.

**God's Love and Our Love**

"We love because he first loved us" (I John 4.19). Truly, love is the only proper response to this innate, holy, giving, leading love of God. We love God first of all, and then we learn from God's love how we should love the people around us.