

## THE FARTHEST THING FROM A LEAF BLOWER 1 John 4:7-8

This past Friday was Valentine's Day. I view that as a trap holiday. Athletes talk about trap games. Those are games against easy opponents that come after tough games. They are easy to overlook and end up being games with little upside and a lot of downside. Valentine's feels a little like that to me. Any way I found myself in the card shop looking for a card for Laurie. It occurred to me that love obviously is a big deal to everybody. I thought it appropriate to think a bit about love today. To direct our thinking we will look at 1 John 4:7-8. Those verses tell us that God is love. But what does that mean? How is God love?

### ***Love is defined by God***

This does not mean love is God. Some people want to turn this into saying that love is God, that love is all there is to God. This is not correct. God is a person, not a thing. He has many aspects to his character. He is holy, just, righteous, good, wise, powerful, sovereign, and so on. He has knowledge, he can be grieved, he can be pleased. These are qualities of a person.

John's statement is a bit like saying of someone, "He is kindness itself." In other words, he is the epitome, the ideal embodiment of that quality. When John said God is love he meant God is the epitome of it, the ideal and perfect embodiment of it. If you want to know what love is, look at God. You will see what love really looks and acts like when you see God as he is. This is crucial s because we're not always clear on exactly what love is. What do we mean when we say, "I love you"? What we should mean is that I behave toward you the way that God does.

This does not mean God condones everything. Our culture now pretty much defines loving someone as accepting and condoning what they do and who they are. If you say you love someone then you must never, ever, judge something they are or do to be wrong or bad. So Christians find themselves in the unpleasant situation of sometimes claiming they love someone but do not accept what that person does only to hear, "I thought you were a Christian. You're supposed to love everyone."

Even a little common sense would tell us there is something wrong with that construction. If a person seeks to do something that is self destructive or is bad for him or her the loving thing to do is not accept it or condone it but to warn the person and seek to dissuade him or her. So God doesn't condone everything we are or do. He loves us and therefore opposes our ideas when they are bad for us. He

does not condone evil and will act to stop it because evil by definition is destructive. So when we say God is love we do not mean that he will never stand against anything.

God's love is grounded in himself and is unchanging. When we say "I love you" typically we mean there is something about you that appeals to me, that makes me feel, good, something that I enjoy. That something could be how you look, how you behave, the way you treat me or some combination of those things. Of course the problem with all of those things is that they could change. Or how I feel about those things could change. The most obvious of those, of course is the most shallow. I love you because of how you look. We have had people who have seen photos of Laurie and me at our wedding ask, "Uh, was that your first wife, Rick?" It's because Laurie looks so different now than she did when we got married. Now lucky for me, though I knew she was beautiful when we got married, I think she is more attractive today than when we got married. But that is unusual. And we all know that if you love someone because of how they look and those looks change, as they inevitably will, then the "love" will disappear.

A common idea about love is that people love another person because of how that person makes them feel. There is that emotional high that they get when they are around that person. The problem is that high inevitably wears off in a year or so, or even less. When the person no longer gives you those tingles, if the tingles is your concept of love, then by definition you no longer love that individual.

The problem with our love is that it can and does change. We have had friends whom we loved and were very close to, but then life changed, they changed, and somehow those friends drifted out of our lives. My best friends in high school were John Christensen, Ron Smith and Davy Mireles. I have no idea where any of them are today. My best friends in college were Don Lewis, Pat Curtis and the Buchanan brothers. I don't know where they are. We all changed and our friendships changed. I still have good memories of those guys, but to say I love them still would be a stretch. I don't have a relationship with them anymore.

The thing about God's love is that it is everlasting. In Jeremiah 31:3 the Lord said to his people, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving kindness." God doesn't go his separate way and lose interest in us nor does he get tired of us. The reason that God's love can be unchanging is that God himself is unchanging and his love is not founded in our ability to appeal to him. God loves us because it is his nature to love. It is who he is. For him to stop loving would be for him to stop being God. If you took away the bat and ball from

baseball and gave the players a football, what game would they be playing? I don't know what it would be, but it wouldn't be baseball. Hitting the ball with the bat is the central and essential feature of the game. Take it out and it's not baseball. And if at any moment God was not loving, he wouldn't be God because love is central to his character.

Romans 5:8 is one of the most powerful verses in all the Bible. "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were sinners, Christ died for us." His love wasn't motivated by or dependent on our goodness or our merit. It came from him and him alone. In his book, *God As He Longs For You To See Him* (p. 181), Chip Ingram says, "We don't provoke, trick, convince, earn or win God's love. He doesn't love us because of who we are but because of who he is."

On September 29, 2006 Michael Monsoor, a Navy Seal, was with his unit in Ramadi in Iraq. They were engaged in a firefight with insurgents when a grenade was thrown into their position. Monsoor, who could have escaped, instead jumped on the grenade. He saved his teammates by sacrificing himself. We understand that. But now envision a soldier being captured by the enemy. As he is being held prisoner by the enemy soldiers a grenade is tossed into the area where he is being held. He dives on the grenade to save his captors! That is much more like what God did for us. That's how he loves us. This is why Paul wrote in Romans 8:39 that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. It's because nothing motivates it other than the unchanging character of God.

God's love is personal. We may accept that God loves the world, but not believe that God actually loves us individually. Not just loves us, but actually delights in us. Most Christians are familiar with Galatians 2:20. "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God." We hear talks about that verse a lot. But we often forget the last few words of the verse. Paul lives by faith in the Son of God "who loved me and gave himself for me." He loved me. Not just the whole world. He loved me. He gave himself for me, personally, individually.

Jesus said the Father knows the number of hairs on your head. Psalm 139 says God knows all the days of your life. He knows you and loves you as a person. He doesn't just put up with you. He loves you. Experts tell us that there are 80 million people in the "millennials" generation. Of those 80 million 2 were born to Rick and Laurie Myatt. I don't know what most of those 80 million are doing. But I can tell what those 2 are doing. I care about what's happening in their lives intensely. I am interested in everything they are up to and am anxious to talk to them and their

spouses. at all times. I think they are terrific people and am absurdly proud of them. I love them because they are mine and nothing will change that. I recall when Carissa was about 6 weeks old we took her to the doctor for a well baby visit. Understand that in earlier years I wanted nothing to do with babies. I wasn't anxious to hold one because I feared it would do something disgusting on me. So there we are in the doctor's office waiting, and I was holding Carissa. The nurse called our name and I handed Carissa to Laurie. I then saw that she had spit up all over my shirt. When I stood up I saw that she had also had an event in her southern hemisphere and that had leaked onto my pants. My worst baby fears had come true. And I didn't care. I loved that little girl more than I could express, and I still do. Do you think I'm a better Father than God? Obviously I am not. God is into you. He loves you intensely

### ***Love drives God***

God is love means that everything God does is motivated by love. Every act, even judgment and discipline he does out of love. Every prayer he answers, every prayer he answers “no” is because he loves us. Logic tells us this. To love means to desire and work for the good of a person. Is there ever a moment when God is not desiring and pursuing our good? If there is in that moment he is seeking something other than our good, and that makes him untrustworthy and evil. Fortunately he always pursues our good because he always loves.

Scripture proves that God always loves. Paul gave his great description of love in 1 Corinthians 13. You could just substitute God for love in that passage and you will see what I mean. God is patient, God is kind, God does not envy, and so on. But remember the first three verses. “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.” Whatever you do, if you do it out of anything but love, you are just an irritating noise.

A number of years ago Laurie and I went to a conference in Phoenix in April. When the conference ended we had an afternoon and evening to ourselves. It was about 85 degrees so we went out to the pool at our hotel. It was lovely. We were just going to relax and read in the nice warm sun. We were there about 10 minutes and then the gardeners showed up. I don't know why they had gardeners. There was almost no landscaping. It was all concrete. They decided they could clean the area using leaf blowers. They cranked up two of them. It was deafening. It was so loud it was hard to read because it was difficult to concentrate. It didn't last for a couple of minutes. It went on interminably. It was really annoying.

Paul was saying when you are not motivated by love you are like those leaf blowers. You are a blight on creation, an irritation at best and a curse at worst. You are a noise pollutant. So here's the question: is God ever a leaf blower? Is he ever a blight, an irritating noise pollutant? No, because he never does a single thing, he never has a single thought, he never says a single word, that is not motivated by love. Everything God has ever done or ever will do is from love.

It may not always feel like God loves you when life turns upside down. But in 1 John 4:9 John said, "This is how God showed his love among us: he sent his own and only Son into the world that we might live through him." He has proven his love at the cross of Jesus Christ.

### ***Love is derived from God***

Notice what John said in 1 John 4:7. "Love comes from God." Not just the love that God has for us, but even our love for each other comes from God. Every bit of love that has ever existed is from God. He is the spring from which the river of love flows. Without God, there is no love.

In our kitchen there is a sink that has a faucet. It has just one handle. You pull it up and can turn it left or right depending on whether you want hot or cold water. You can also pull it out of its base because it has a flexible hose attached to it. Now in our bathroom upstairs I have a sink that also has a faucet that looks very different. It has two handles. Turn one for hot, the other for cold. We also have a shower with a faucet that looks really different. Outside we have a faucet with a hose attached to it that looks even more different and cannot produce hot water. Then there are the toilets that also produce water when you flush them. Then there are the sprinklers in both front and back. There are somewhere around 25 sources of water at our house. They all look very different, they perform different functions, some produce hot and cold water, some just cold. But all of that water, no matter how it is delivered and in what form, comes from the same source. There is a water main coming to our house and every drop of water we use comes from that water main. Love may come in some different forms and may be delivered to us by different people, but in the end it all comes from the same source. That source is God.

I had parents who loved me. I have a brother who has loved me all my life. I have an even greater gift. I am married to a woman whose love is a wellspring of joy and life, love that she has given to me without reservation for 35 years. In fact, it was 35 years ago on Friday that she told me she loved me and meant it. I have been incredibly blessed with love in my life. I have kids who love me. I also have

friends who have loved me far more than I deserve. Every bit of that love, every moment I have been loved by other people, is a gift from God. That's what John tells me. James confirms this. In James 1:17 he said, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights." Love is the best gift any of us could ever receive. It comes from God. All of it.

### CONCLUSION

In Ephesians 3:19 Paul prayed that we would be filled to all the fullness of God. How full is God? Totally full. He is full of joy, full of peace, full of life and glory, full of love for others, full of goodness. Paul wanted you to have that fullness in the kind of measure God has it. Don't you want that too? Absolutely. So how do we get there? It's not by getting the second blessing, being baptized by the Holy Spirit, being slain in the Spirit. Read verses 18-19. Here's how: you grasp how broad, how wide, how long, how high and how deep the love of God is. You know and experience the love of God that is beyond our ability to truly grasp. The single most significant factor in whether you will experience the fullness of life is how you grasp, believe and trust in the love of God.

I used to suffer from canker sores that resembled the sinkhole that ate all those classic Corvettes recently. They were huge and extremely painful. The worst was a time I had a reaction to some medication I was taking that caused a swarm of them. It was painful to talk and to eat. It even interrupted my sleep. We were up in Seattle and I was supposed to preach for Jerry but it was so painful I couldn't. It's been at least 15 years and he still gives me grief about it. I could function to some extent, but not fully and I was constantly in pain. That's kind of what we are like when we don't experience love in our lives. We have pain and can barely function. It distorts our existence. The only thing that can heal us is love. We will always experience distortion and pain until we experience the love of God.

The day Bill Clinton was inaugurated for his second term as President he had an ecumenical prayer breakfast. Leaders from a number of faiths participated. Near the end of the event Bill Hybels, senior pastor of Willow Creek Community Church near Chicago, an enormous megachurch, spoke. Hybels and Clinton had become friends. Hybels spoke of his admiration for the President and said he wanted to give him a gift to honor him. He struggled with what you give the President of the United States. He finally decided on what would be appropriate. He had brought with him a group from his church to deliver his gift. A group of 6 men and women then came up and stood right in front of Mr. and Mrs. Clinton. They sang a song acapella. The song they sang was *The Love of God*.

Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made,  
Were every stalk on earth a quill and every man a scribe by trade,  
To write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole, through stretched from sky to sky.

Oh love of God, how rich, how pure, how measureless and strong.  
It shall for evermore endure the saints and angels song.