

***The LORD preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy.  
(Psa 145:20)***

Friends, as we work our way along this pilgrim path, it is important that we spend focused energy making our calling and election sure (2 Pe 1:10). As I reminded you last time, this is not a call to earn God's favor through works by which we make that calling "sure". It isn't earning additional marks in the Book of Life as it were. I've heard preachers that claim to be Calvinist in their theology say that the calling of God is predestinated, but the duty we have is to earn it, in a strange mix of works righteousness and election. It's a bizarre thing to hear and it is simply untrue. That's not what Peter is exhorting to, which the context plainly bears out.

Working to make our calling and election sure is about the work to silence that voice seeking to convict us of our sins and convince us the blood of Christ was not shed for us, despite those things that give us hope that our lives have indeed been bought with Christ's precious blood. Our "making" in this context is the work of overcoming the old man and that condemns us, working out for ourselves the actuality of our calling. This making sure our election is a summarization of what Peter had just enumerated as these elements

*"... giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity." (2Pe 1:5-7)*

These are the things we must do to make our calling and election sure in our own hearts and minds. And remember, that's the proving ground – with us and God. We aren't seeking to prove our calling according to someone else's feelings on the matter. Others will see the results of this work and recognize another sheep in the fold, but you're not working to convince someone else or live up to someone else's standard (or try to force your standard on someone else). God has set the standard, and that is what we must seek understanding of and align ourselves with to make this calling and election "sure".

As the world hurtles toward its destruction, this energetic work is more and more important. As things are set in order for the rise of the final Antichrist, Satan will increasingly use cardboard Christianity to promote and advance his lies about our God and His nature, seeking to muddle the truth. We already see how that assault on the truth is fashioned when we have to deal with the uneducated, false narrative that our telling of the Gospel can't be true, there is no hate in the Bible, because "God is love".

I heard this recently from someone on the streets and when challenged this person couldn't explain – within their world view and understanding of God – how things like the repeated destruction of Florida by hurricanes, the trafficking of millions of children across the globe, the burning of LA, mass shootings at schools, etc., how these things can happen in a world ruled by a God who is just gushing love. If you can't explain the existence of these things within your view of God being only love according to your definition of love, then you don't have a right understanding of God. If you don't have a right understanding of God, you likely aren't worshiping the God of the Bible.

It is unquestionable and indisputable that God is love. To understand our God and the truth about Him, to align ourselves to His will and be properly working to increase our confidence in Him, it is important to understand Him as best we can. We can't fully understand His perfection. He is infinite, everlasting, uncreated, perfect Spirit. We are limited, created, beings of decaying flesh. We are not His equals or His equivalents. He is not "one of us". He is in literally every conceivable and inconceivable way superior to all His creations. He is outside the full understanding certainly of mankind in our present state. We cannot look at Him and His attributes or qualities and define them in terms of our attributes or qualities. Just like you can't explain the emotional and rational qualities of man in terms of a rock.

The phrase "God is love" appears twice in Scripture, both in the same passage. We're going to start this brief examination by looking at the full passage, because like you have heard me say so many times, context is important; here context largely helps provide the definition of the phrase. So the passage from 1 John reads:

*"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for **God is love**. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. **Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.** And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. **God is love**; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us. **If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?** And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also." (1Jn 4:7-21)*

Let's start with the words in red. I think this creates a very clear visual representation within a lot of words of precisely the context we are working with.

The position cardboard Christians hold that "God is love" is a statement made in isolation as a generic declaration is a grievous lie. Look at what we see from this visual— look at the words in red – us, we, our, beloved – all throughout the passage. John is talking to a specific set of people, which builds a contextual framework that cannot be ignored or dismissed.

John is making a point to his friends, his brothers and sisters in Christ, the flock of God. He is reiterating one of the most repeated messages in all of the New Testament – love one another. This is one of the most comprehensive exhortations to the love of the brethren in all of Scripture, I think.

John very eloquently provides a singular reason that should drive all of Christ's followers to love one another – His love for them; “if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another”. There you have it. If you call yourself a Christian and purport to follow God, one of the key identifiers of you having a true faith is your love of the brethren. That word “brethren” which though not used here is used in other places like 1 John 2 can, according to Thayer, mean all men. But it more commonly means specifically “brethren in Christ”, which this context would heavily support. To love the brethren requires you to know who they are. The specificity of John's discussion separates this loving one another from the general love we are commanded to show all men, even our enemies.

John is intimately talking to a specific group of people. Of course, you can make a strong argument that all mankind has a duty to operate in love toward one another. But John is clearly speaking to that group of people who will be identified by their obvious, visible love for one another, Christ's followers.

*“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”*  
(Joh 13:35)

You can see he differentiates between his beloved brothers and sisters and the general mass of mankind with the words in the **rust** color

*“If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”*

Men frequently lay claim to being Christ's disciples but don't do the most basic of things to **demonstrate** their discipleship. This is a very strong and clear warning. He drops out of the specific context he has been using to use that generic “man” for a reason, drawing a distinction between the behavior of worldly men and what is expected of the Godly, using that behavior as the example of what to so eagerly avoid in our walk.

Loving our brothers is not a passive or optional thing. You don't get to set conditions for when you will or won't or what gates people have to go through to “earn” your love. There are no hoops you get to put in front of that. Christ didn't give us an out. His disciples love one another. Period.

This love doesn't mean we always agree with each other; it doesn't mean that we support each other in the commission of sin, accepting each other “just as we are” ignoring the need for holiness and repentance; this love is not feigned showmanship; this love is consumed with bearing each other's burdens; this love is a uniting and unifying element against the world. This love is not self-righteousness masked as “care” for another's soul.

This love doesn't allow us to exalt ourselves and require others to meet our standard to gain that love. It is just there for those who are of like faith, regardless of how they may be different from us. In that regard it is accepting. It is considerate. It is long-suffering. It doesn't have to be looked for in the cracks and crevices. It is obvious and on its face. How else could all men know Christ's disciples by this love?

This context helps us to understand this isn't just some generic catch-all point John is making about God being love. He's not pontificating randomly; he's drawing into sharp focus for those who claim to be believer's the **reason** behind our need to love one another. This isn't an emotional thing. This isn't sappiness. This love isn't a peck on the cheek and a knife in the back. It's real. It abounds. It grows and abides above all love for the world and worldly things.

Now, before I address the phrase "God is love" more fully, I want to address the part of the passage I put in *blue*

*"Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God."*

This is another part of John's exhortation that gets twisted by false cardboard Christianity, trying to make it out that all you have to do is say some rote words and bada-bing bada-boom, God dwells in you, because "God is love" and dwelling in you is guaranteed. It's a false notion that because God is love he expresses that love in some mushy human way. But John doesn't say "God loves". He says, "God is love". Those are very different.

Confessing Jesus is not simply saying "Jesus is the Son of God". It's not the simple stating of an obvious fact that makes you a Christian. I can't tell you the number of times I've had simpletons make this statement as though it is some kind of magic. Let's consider this closely.

Paul puts this in very clear and direct language to make the point that this isn't just you reading something off a piece of paper in a so-called 'church' while the choir sings "Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling":

*"Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that **no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.**" (1Co 12:3)*

Obviously, any person can say the words "Jesus is the Lord", so that cannot be what Paul is saying. There has to be more to this idea of confessing or saying that Jesus is Lord than just the simple utterance. Confessing Jesus starts with believing, confessing His deity to be the truth, *then living in that truth*. None of these things can be done without the intervention of the Holy Spirit and God-delivered faith.

We see from other Scriptures that just knowing Jesus is the Lord isn't what is meant

*“And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him.” (Mar 1:34)*

*“Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.” (Jas 2:19)*

Knowledge and simple belief of the fact that Jesus is God doesn't cause God to dwell in you, unless you're going to make some argument that He dwells in the devils. If God is love, according to the human definition of love, then this knowledge being in the devils would be enough to save them from His wrath and their ultimate destruction. Is anyone going to try and make the case that God dwells in the devils, that His being love transmits that love to the fallen angels? I should hope not.

If there is nothing to discern about this love, and it simply follows the way of human emotion, then it also becomes fickle, non-binding and ever-changing, all things we know that God is not.

### God is love

Let's examine the phrase. When John uses these words, it is an absolute statement. It is not an absolute statement of God's expression.

I'm not sure that we can really comprehend what it is to **be** love. It is beyond our experience, our understanding and perhaps even beyond the capabilities of our created frame to comprehend what it means to **be** love. Given that this could rightly be called one of the mysteries of God, it behooves us not to be simplistic with our explanation of it. We certainly must refrain from assigning to it human qualities.

We certainly understand what it is to express love, to lose it, to grow in it. But those things are not **being** since by their very definition those words indicate a temporary presence or absence. God is as much love as we are carbon, if that makes sense. You can't remove the carbon from our physical existence. You can't remove the love from His existence, but not all He does is an expression of that love in the sense that cardboard Christianity would have you believe. God being love does not constrain Him to doing only those things that humans see as "good". That is the gravest error made in this discussion, I think.

One of the most important things to understand about our God being love is that this love is not an emotion in the sense we have emotions. When John says "God is love" he is not articulating that God has or expresses this emotion as men know it. He isn't expressing God's having an emotion at all.

This is what is so important to grasp here. John is stating a simple fact that one of the core elements, the essence if you will of God is that He **is** love. There are two other things in Scripture we are directly told that God fundamentally **is**.

We are told in Scripture that God is light

*“This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” (1Jn 1:5)*

He is the antithesis of darkness. He is the source of all light and in Him there is no darkness, no shadow associated with Him. This light is pure, a fundamental element of His existence. It is not the light He created. It is brighter, purer, and not limited by the rules of physics. When He shines this light on a thing it does not travel at 186,000 miles per second, it instantaneously fills whatever space He has directed it to shine in. It cannot be blocked or impeded. It cannot be smothered by shadow or darkness. This light prevents anything from being hidden in the shadows from Him.

We are also told God is spirit

*“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” (Joh 4:24)*

After examining the original, I am inclined to agree with Arthur Pink in his assessment that the indefinite article ‘a’ is misplaced here and does a disservice to the essentiality of God’s being spirit. He is not just “a” spirit, He is quintessential spirit that all other forms of spirit pale in comparison to. This is a crucial thing to understand about God. He has no form that can be corrupted or that can fail. He is not limited by physical boundaries and is therefore omnipresent. That omnipresence means nothing can be done that is not in His immediate and direct sight or not done in His presence.

We are certainly told that God is holy (Ps 99:9), that He is a consuming fire (Deu 4:4), He is merciful (Deu 4:31), He is jealous (Deu 6:15), He is the refuge of His people (Deu 33:27), He is gracious (2 Chr 30:9), God is mighty (Job 36:5), He is great (Job 36:26), He is angry (Ps 7:11). But these are all expressions, for lack of a better word, of His core being, not a part of His fundamental existence as it were.

God being love is more than an attribute, and I personally think Pink whiffs a little bit in treating this element of God as just another attribute, and many expositors struggle to explain this concept. It is not an easy one to explain, so I’m not faulting, I just think many explanations fall short. Pink’s words on God’s love are well worth reading, don’t get me wrong, I just want you to remember if you go read them, this that John is pointing out here is not the expression of the love, it is a thing of itself he is calling to our attention. The primary expression of this essential love is in the sending of Christ to redeem His elect.

Put another way, it is not simply that God loves, but that as a core of His essential being He *is* love; similar to His not being a spirit but fundamentally spirit. The love of God is not an emotion, and to think of it in terms of human emotions is a grave error. God certainly expresses His love, and I think it is safe to say that the expression of His love is akin to the expression of an emotion, but it is fundamentally not at the same time. His essential being and His expression are two different things.

God being love is, along with His being light and spirit, the source of everything He does and everything He is. It is because His love is central to His existence that nothing can separate His people from it (Rom. 8:39). While we like to think that the genuine love people have for each other – the love of a parent for a child, the love between spouses, children for their parents – is an unbreakable bond, the reality is that human love is as fragile and destructible as anything else in this life.

Do we not see proof of this every day? Husbands kill their wives, mothers their children, children their parents. The love of humans is brittle, fragile and fickle, because it is an emotion that can and is regularly manipulated and influenced by such meager things as the physical environment and how we feel at any given time. Emotions are inconsistent and in need of constant control. They are unworthy of an all-powerful God.

John here tells us how perfect and astoundingly great this love is despite it not being an emotional expression

*“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”*

His being love generates the expression of it. Not only did He send His only begotten Son, but He sent Him while the targets of this love were sinners by nature. There was nothing endearing, nothing making these targets worthy of His expressing love upon them. Yet, despite the state the recipients of this expression of love were in, He did it and has continued in that state of love for those elected souls from before the first man was created and will stay in that frame of being toward them for eternity.

This is a primary difference between this love that is the nature of God and love that comes from the emotion of men. His love is not a reciprocation of anything else. It is an origin, a root that springs from His perfection and that cannot be equally returned. Not only did He love us when we were incapable of loving Him, He sent as propitiation to take the place of our debt payment His only Son. There is no expression of love capable of equaling this in all of mankind.

So if He is love, why is there so much misery in the human existence? Why is LA an ash pit right now? Why is American Airlines flight 5342 in the Potomac? This is a constant refrain from man – why? Why? Why?

The answer is hard for vain, prideful men to accept. Without the Holy Ghost working light into your heart, you won't accept it. God's essential love drives His accomplishment of His ends. Nothing more, nothing less. That means it is focused in its expression where He wills it to be expressed, and nothing receives its benefits but that which He will express that essential love on. His ends have been, since before the creation, to dwell in eternity with His elect. Everything He has set in motion from before time began has been to deliver on this end. It is driven by His essential love for those whom He chose. The separation,

the reprobation, the election, the saving of a few, the condemning of the rest, the leaving fallen angels to their destruction, all are borne out of His essential and perfect love and work toward the end of dwelling with His elect angels and men in eternity. All of it.

Out of that pure, unfeigned, purposeful love is expressed a necessary, mandatory duty for His people to follow – loving one another.

Loving each other is not looking at other people and assuming they will mature to be what it is you view of yourself. It is actively recognizing and submitting to the truth that every person in the body of Christ is a vessel placed there by that God who is love, to accomplish **His purposes**, whether or not you see that purpose or understand it. Part of that love for the body is thankfulness that everyone in the body is not you. Thankfulness that your flaws and weaknesses are buttressed up, through the providence of that God who is love, by others, perhaps even that person you believe is weak. This love isn't just tolerating others being around you, but genuinely embracing the truth as Paul reminds us that the ear doesn't need to be the eye, nor the foot the hand, because if we were all the same – the same opinions, views, temperaments, capabilities, strength, degree of faith etc. – we would not be a body made up perfectly of those parts God by His essential love has formed together. This love for one another must be complete, unfeigned and without exception for those who have professed and demonstrate faith in God.

Loving one another is, as I said before not passive, nor is it optional. There is growth here we must constantly do. It is going to be more and more important as the days grow darker and the evil greater to practice this love and develop it practically. I don't know exactly what that looks like, but I feel this deeply. I have work, each of you has work, we all collectively have work to do to perfect this love we have for the brethren.

As we conclude today, consider these words Moses delivered to the children of Israel about this love

*“The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations; And repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face.” (Deu 7:7-10)*