



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Christmas Eve Lessons and Carols

December 24, 2024

Assurance of Love

1 John 4:7–16

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶ So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

Love is patient and kind, says the Apostle Paul. And it's true. Everything he says about love in that famous "love chapter" is true. Love does not envy or boast, it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way, it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love indeed is and does all of this. But not yours.

Paul is not describing your love here. He's not giving a prescription for love, nor is he issuing directives. The verb forms here are not imperatives; they are indicatives. What Paul writes is not about how things ought to be; it's about how they really are. But not with you. You see, Paul is not writing about your love, for your love can be none of these things. Not on your own, it can't. Your love, by nature, is a shallow, hollow, dim shadow of real love. For real love is found only in God Himself.

But this does not mean that you are free to be unloving. You are not free to be envious or boastful, to be arrogant or rude, to insist on your own way, to be irritable or resentful. You are not free to rejoice at wrongdoing. A godly goal for all of us is to love as God loves, to rejoice in the truth, to bear all things, to believe, hope, and endure all things, for God, through His Apostle John, calls us beloved, and then urges us to love one another.

How? When our natural inclination is to be all that love is not, to do all that love does not, how is it that we can truly love one another? John gives us the answer: "Love is from God." "Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love." And



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“whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.”

Salvation, we know, is a gift we must receive from God, or else we do not have it. Love is the same. Without receiving love from God, we do not have it.

Like every other gift from God, the enemy has his counterfeit. He fools people into thinking they can save themselves through their own good works, that there is some level we can attain that is “good enough” to be accepted by God, which is a lie, and we know it. “Be perfect, even as your father in heaven is perfect,” Jesus said (Matt. 5:48). Unless you’re a liar like the devil, you know full well that you’re anything but perfect. Salvation by good works is a counterfeit of the truth that we can only be saved by the holy and perfect work of God’s Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, whose birth we celebrate this evening.

Satan also has a counterfeit of love, a love that flies in the face of the real God-given love Jesus describes in John’s Gospel when He says, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Real love, godly love, gives itself with no expectation of return, sacrificing itself for nothing more than the joy of doing so for the benefit of those it loves. Counterfeit love seeks self-gratification, always expecting, perhaps demanding, a return in kind. Counterfeit love always has in mind the benefit of the giver; real godly love always has at heart the benefit of the receiver. There is a vast difference between the two. A person without God thinks he has love, but it’s only a counterfeit; it’s not real, which is why so many in our world today are scrambling to find a love that lasts. Are you?

For you to have real love, it is absolutely essential that you know God on a personal level. And, since there is no way for you to climb into heaven and get to know Him, He came down to earth that you might come to know Him. This, my friends, is what we are celebrating tonight – the arrival of the One who would show us God, who would be God among us, who would manifest the love of God to the world by sacrificing Himself for the objects of His love. This means you. You are loved by God. Jesus came to show God’s love to you. He was born for you. He died for you. And for you He was raised that He might give you everlasting salvation as a gift, by grace through faith.

“In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins,” thus satisfying the wrath of God and making peace between God and mankind.

Of course, that’s not the end of it. God knows that for love to be fulfilled and fulfilling, it must be shared. Love is a strange commodity, in that the more of it you give away, the more of it you have to give away. This is one reason why God commands us in our text to love one another – because our love increases and we are blessed when we love someone else. The other reason is that only those who know the love of God are in a position to share it. “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” “If



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Share His love this Christmas, beloved. Know it, receive it, give it. His love is contagious. By His grace and with His help, let's go infect our world, to God's glory and our great blessing. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen