

# 1 John 4:7-12 God is Love

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It is an absolute privilege to open up the scriptures once again this morning. Have you ever thought about where we would be if we had no Bible?

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We would have no knowledge of God in such a full revelation that the scriptures provide, we would have no knowledge of salvation, we would have no church and essentially we would have no hope.

As one theologian has put it the Bible shows us who God is and who we are, both a knowledge of God and a knowledge of ourselves.

Without this knowledge we would be lost with nothing to light our path as we journey through life and on into eternity.

In the passage we are going to look at this morning we see this relationship between God and ourselves reaching its culmination - the Easter message. The gospel wrapped up in six short verses.

1 John 4:7-12

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.

Once again we see the use of the term “born of God” in verse 7, and this is an event that takes place in our lives just as our natural birth has taken place.

Our spiritual birth is also an event, it may have taken a spiritual nine months before the birth took place but it did take place and it was of God.

John says here that whoever loves has been born of God.

Now does John mean that if we only love or are loving people that we have been born of God and know God?

If we had no Bible and this was the only fragment of scripture that we had then yes you could infer that this would be the case.

But we have a whole Bible which adds to our understanding of God and how we are to know him.

John himself makes quite clear that we must be united to God in an abiding relationship through Jesus that is witnessed to us by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Loving or being a loving person is a result of the union we have with Jesus and it comes from God because God is Love. He is the foundation of our love

This is one of the most used snippets of scripture – God is Love.

I have often found that it is plucked out of its context and used in a way to make up a God that looks like nothing like the God of the Bible. An idol, of a fertile imagination and not the Holy, loving, all knowing, all powerful, unchangeable God of the scriptures.

So, what does it mean that God is Love from the **context** of this passage that we are looking at?

Does it mean that he is a big softie and will let us get away with anything?  
Does it mean that he will not punish sin in us or in others?  
Does it mean that he will play favourites with those who are somehow better people than us or with us because we believe we are better people than others?

I want to ask each of you a question and I don't want you to answer it with your mouths. I want you to think deeply about it and answer it in your minds.

Do you and I deserve to be eternally separated from Jesus and deserving of hell?

How you answer this question in your mind will tell a lot about how well you understand the gospel.

Once again, I believe it is too easy to say no we don't deserve hell as a loving God wouldn't do that to his creatures.

If we say that – as appealing as it might be, we are in great danger of completely misinterpreting scripture and setting up for ourselves a false view of God.

So let's look at what God is Love means in its immediate scriptural context beginning from verse eight.

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

God's love was demonstrated, it made manifest, it was shown to us – we have seen it. It wasn't mere talk it was God's love in action.

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How? He **sent** his only son into the world that we might live through him.

We only truly know God's love fully when we give up living our own lives and expect him to get behind what we are doing and begin to live our lives through him and for his purpose.

And he sent his son to accomplish this task in us and this is his love - not that we can somehow claim that we first loved God but that in fact he first loved us from a distance and then brought us near to himself.

Now how did he do this?

Verse 10 says that God sent his son to be a **propitiation** for our sins.

Ok here we come across this unusual word propitiation again. So, what does it mean that Jesus is a propitiation for our sins?

We last came across this word back in 1 John chapter 2 and I explained it with a demonstration. This time Ian and Alan are each going to explain it to us.

Ian:

Appropriate at Easter, as propitiation is one of the things achieved at the Cross.

It is an old-fashioned word for an act of God that never goes out of fashion.

It is an unpopular term for something that should be everyone's greatest desire.

Propitiation should be both terrifying and comforting at the same time. Terrifying because it speaks to us about how sinful we are. Not just that I'm not as bad as the bloke down the road; I'm not like Adolf Hitler. But I am utterly sinful. There is nothing good within me. Propitiation tells me all about that.

It is also incredibly comforting, because it tells me that God did something to deal with that.

We know some things about God. We know from creation that He is powerful. But we can only know from His Word that He is holy, that He is just, that He is the judge. As Joanne told us last week, God cannot be in the presence of sin, because He is holy. He has declared that sin must be dealt with, and the only suitable punishment is death.

God is furious about sin. Not just that God says, "I don't like it very much, but I'm going to ignore it." God is furious about it. Even the New Testament speaks frequently about God's wrath, His furious anger against sin, and His determination to punish it, and eventually wipe it out entirely. And every single one of us is a sinner. We are conceived in sin, and go on to live in sin and rebellion against God. We despise Him and we despise His glory. This is the terrifying part of Propitiation. We deserve eternal punishment commensurate (that is, in equal amounts) to our rebellion against His infinite glory. Infinite is an important word. God's glory is infinite. Our rebellion against it should be infinite. That's what sin deserves.

But this presents God with a dilemma. How to pour out His anger against sin, and yet still save those He has chosen to love and to save?

The equation goes something like this: God hates sin. God is a just, wise and all-knowing judge, nothing escapes His view. God must punish sin or He will not be a just and righteous judge. All of mankind are sinners. Therefore, God must punish mankind. But, God has also declared that He loves and wants to save some of us. So, God must find a way to punish sin but to reveal His great mercy at the same time. And this is where propitiation comes into the picture. Propitiation is the act, performed by Jesus, which appeases, or satisfies, and turns away the wrath of God, and makes God *propitious* (that is, *favourably inclined*) towards mankind.

An illustration, clumsy, but I hope helpful:

Imagine God's wrath against the sin of all mankind is a poison, so dangerous and so toxic that the tiniest molecule, the tiniest drop will cause unbelievable suffering and death. And God is so furious about sin that He is going to pour out all that poison on mankind.

Imagine also that Jesus is a sponge, so effective that He is able to soak up every single drop of this poison, until nothing remains. Nothing, not a single molecule. Jesus has absorbed all of God's wrath. And in the act of absorbing it, He neutralises it; He takes the poison out of it.

But even better than that, He not only neutralises it, He turns God's wrath into a sweet tasting, life-giving potion for those who receive it.

I need to stress that this act of propitiation can only be received by those who give themselves to Jesus Christ in faith. For those who are believers in Jesus Christ, every aspect of God's anger and condemnation and punishment has been carried out on Jesus Christ. Every aspect of it. There remains only God's favour and God's blessing and God's good will towards and God's approval of His children. Never will there be any judgment, or alienation from God again. Our sins past, present or future will never be counted against us, because God's fury has been absorbed by our Saviour on our behalf.

*31 What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? 32 Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? 33 Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. 34 Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us.*

*35 Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? 36 (As the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.") 37 No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.*

*38 And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. 39 No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:31-39 (NLT)*

David read earlier during worship from Ephesians 1 that God's blessings are "according to the riches of His grace." How much grace does God have? An infinite amount, and it is according to the *riches* of His grace "which He lavished upon us" it says in Ephesians. He *lavished* His grace upon us. It is staggering, it is exciting, it is comforting. I was in tears as we were worshipping this morning because I was just overwhelmed by what Jesus Christ has done for me.

Sadly, for all others, for those who are not in relationship with Jesus Christ, the wrath of God still remains to be poured out and experienced. That is a terrifying thought. This tells us something about the benefits for us of propitiation, and it is so important for us to truly understand, for us to get right into our hearts. It is life-giving and liberating. But it tells us little about the cost to Jesus Christ. Jesus absorbed all of that poisonous wrath. Jesus Christ became the object of the intense hatred of sin which God had patiently stored up since the beginning of the world. He absorbed all the poisonous fury of God's righteous anger against sin in His body on the Cross.

*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2Co 5:21 ESV*

*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. 1Pe 2:24 ESV*

To bear sin in the presence of a holy God is a fearful thing. Even the holy angels before the throne of God in Isaiah 6, who have never sinned once in their whole existence, shield their eyes from God. That is how holy God is.

Is it any wonder then that Jesus would pray in the Garden of Gethsemane:

*"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Luk 22:42-44 ESV*

Or that He would cry out from the Cross:

*"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Mat 27:46*

That's the reality of propitiation. Jesus suffered and died that we might be set free, and receive nothing but blessings from God.

Alan:

Propitiation. I've finally got it. It's a word I haven't been able to say all week. It's like I've had a mouth full of marbles.

You know when you read the Bible, you read the Word, you read a sentence before, and you come to a word, and you keep on reading, and you sort of don't know what the word really means.

But you sort of do, it connects, because what's said before and what's said after comes in, especially in a context of what we've been reading. You say, "Oh yeah, it's something to do with Christ's death, the love of God, and all the rest of it." And as Ian was saying, I checked it out. 'Satisfying the righteousness of a holy God making it possible for Him to show mercy.' But I also come back to, I don't want to just repeat a few of those things, but as Tony was saying, without the Bible, without the Word of God, where would we be?

And so, the love of God. Now God is angry, an angry God, with sin. He had anger. So Jesus had to have a violent death to appease that anger. That was a violent death. And that's the magnitude of sin.

And I thought, if we're angry with somebody, we have retribution. That's the first thought that comes into your mind. You know, revenge, retribution, because you're angry. You know, you want to get back at them, or whatever.

But God didn't do that. What He did, He actually went quite the opposite. He was angry with sin. Man had turned his back, man had given Him the big finger, turned around and walked off, basically, you know.

So God, in so doing, He showed pure love and mercy. And it's quite the opposite. I was listening to the radio this morning, there was a bkie, a Bandito in jail. And there were five others from another club, and they got stuck into him. They were angry with him and they wanted to do him in, obviously.

And I thought, now imagine if they had've gone up to him and said, "No, what we'll do, we'll give you our motorbikes, and we'll serve your sentence for you." Can you imagine that? It's sort of incomprehensible, isn't it. You know what I mean?

So here we have a God who's angry. I got this picture. I saw God standing, the Father. We have access now, but we never had access to the Father. We could not get through to the Father. So Jesus is the intercessor. He's in-between. And I saw God standing there, and I saw this massive chasm. And I saw this flat land of nothingness. There's mankind, there's man over there, and there's God. And He's got the Son. And we were singing that song before, "Fall down." And Jesus had to fall down. I saw him fall down, fall across the chasm. His arms stretched out in pure surrender, and there's the bridge. And man went across the bridge.

And there He was, laying out. And I saw that. He had to take the fall, He had to be the fall-guy, basically. And so there's access to the Father through that.

And, you know, propitiation (I got it, fantastic. Been practising really well). For us to love God, it's not natural. A baby isn't born and comes out and wants to love God, you know. Quite the opposite. They're sin creatures, basically, and it shows, you know. And as we grow up, we haven't got a natural tendency to want to love God, because we don't know who He is.

We sort of have a sense of morality, we might think "Yeah, there is a God." But we don't know how to love Him, because we don't know who He is. We just don't.

So, just moving off the side a bit there, Jesus says in *John 14:9*, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." So that means that we, and actually I'll just read also in *Hebrews 4:13*, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weakness, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet without sin. Let us approach the throne of grace with confidence."

And so, through that propitiation, through the death of Christ, through God's anger and using His Son in that violent death, we now have access, and we have someone we can identify with. So we can actually have access to the Father. We can learn to love because Christ had that humanness. God was just out there, you know. I mean, even now, who knows? What's your vision of the Father, God the Father? Everyone in this room's got a different concept, a different vision. It's only through Christ and the humaneness, the God in Him, that gives us the ability to love God. Because you wouldn't be able, you don't know how to love Him. And that's why He had to do that because, you know, the fact that man... it was a calamitous time when man fell, I believe. When he turned his back on God, it wasn't just "Oh yeah, you know, you ate the fruit in the garden. Off you go." I think it was a calamitous time. Christ had to die a violent death, that was a violent separation from God in the beginning, I believe. Violent in the sense that the spiritual wickedness and stuff that was around that. The atmosphere, the whole thing, was just so enormous that it took that violent death, a sacrifice of a human being, you know, for us to have reconciliation back to the Father. Because God is a very principled God. The sun rises, everything in the earth is clockwork, it is just so spot-on. And in human terms, you know, we can overlook things. You know, "It's alright, mate. She'll be right." We do all these little sort of acts of... sometimes they're not really honest. That's culture, that's society. God can't do that. He couldn't say, "You stuffed up. Come back, I'll give you another shot." It happened once. He had to go through this whole process. He cannot, He just cannot overlook, as Ian was saying about sin. He cannot overlook the sin, you know. So He had to do that.

In the Old Testament, the Mercy Seat was the equivalent, where the priest went in, and they had atoning sacrifice of killing an animal and sprinkling the blood. Imagine if we had to keep doing that today. But man was no wiser. He didn't have any understanding. A bunch of ritual, a bunch of stuff. But he was separated from God totally. He couldn't love God, because he didn't know who He was. He just went through only selected people that God revealed Himself to in the Old Testament. But now, through Christ, He has revealed Himself to all of us. Every single one of us, there is no excuse. We have that capacity now to love. And to love Him by reading Scripture, by praying, by understanding. And we have that connection, you know. And also another thing. I had an old capsicum bush, and it had fruit on it, and after it finished fruiting, it was looking a bit sick and was dying. And I thought I'll pull it out,

but I didn't pull it out, I just left it there for some reason. And I went up one day, I was cutting some other plants, and I trimmed it all back and there was this stark looking stick, bits of branches sticking out, and I look at it, that doesn't look too good. But I left it, I just left it there. I pruned it right back and I left it. Anyway, I forgot about it and I just left it there, and every now and then I'd look at it. And all of a sudden noticed a tiny bit of green. Then it got more green, then it got leaves. Then the end of the story is the whole thing bushed up again and got fruit. But that thing was dying, but regeneration. And that's what happened through Christ's death, a regeneration. Everything looked dead and dormant and had it. But through that pruning process, Christ was pruned on the Cross, pruned, bang, bang, gone. Looked dead, but He wasn't dead, He was still alive. And the process of regeneration came back. Through that, that's how we get our regeneration, through that bush. We come back and we bear fruit.

So propitiation, yeah, it's a word. It always pays to look at words and come at them from different angles, because I've found with the Bible you never go up dry gullies or dead end streets. If you go off the track looking at a word, you'll go up another road and it'll always take you back to the highway. And it's quite fascinating.

So it is quite an amazing thing, and I think that the actual process... I think back in those times that the violent death of Christ and the violent fall of man must have just been amazing stuff. Hollywood can't reproduce it. They try and give us all these scary things with noise and all the rest of it, but they will never, you know. You get scared and you think, "Wow, this is amazing stuff." That's nothing compared with what's gone on in the heavenlies beforehand. And what's going on in there right now. And we have access to all of it.

So, that is what propitiation is – God's anger being turned away from us and our sin by turning it toward Jesus who bore our sin and its punishment when he died on the cross so that we wouldn't have to.

Who in their right mind would not want to believe and accept this?

To me it just goes to show the absolute deceitfulness of sin that people do reject this awesome good news and they will do this to their own destruction. Our job is to simply share this good news and warn them of the danger of not believing.

Let's finish off with the last two verses.

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.

This is to be the motivation for our love that because God so loved us so much we need to direct that love that comes from God to us – toward others, friends and enemies alike.

We need to keep ourselves absolutely free from hating and judging others, from holding grudges and not getting along with each other. Let's work through our differences and love each other from the love with which God in Jesus loves us.

We have so much to live for and let us not short change ourselves by not being a loving people who take the gospel beyond our own homes and our own meetings and show this love to a world in desperate need for Jesus love – even if they refuse to believe they need it.