

# Love That Brings Forth Life

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by Rev. Che Choyong

**1 John 4:9–10 (NIV)**

***9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.***

***10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.***

## <Introduction>

We have reached the second week of Advent. Today, I would like for us to think together about God's love.

"God is love." The Bible speaks to us about God's love. The words "God is love" are written in 1 John 4:16, which is today's text. These words comfort us, give us strength, and become an encouragement to us. They also give us the courage to take one step forward, saying, "All right, I will cling to God and live."

As people who have received "God's love," we decide, pray, and desire to walk in a manner worthy of that love, responding to it. Mobilizing all the intellect and emotions we possess, we long to understand that love even a little more deeply. However, God's love is wide and deep, far surpassing human understanding and imagination. Just as a child cannot fully understand a parent's love, we may as well feel God's unconditional love mysterious and incomprehensible.

Today again, I would like to reflect on that mysterious love of God and be encouraged.

## <1. A God Who Gets Angry?>

Parents love their children, yet there are times when they get angry, aren't there? When I was a child and did something bad, there were times when my mother scolded me and said, "I'm angry because I love you." Each time, I thought, "If you love me, you could teach me more gently..." and "I think I would listen more obediently that way."

It was difficult to think of “getting angry” and “loving” at the same time. We tend to think that if someone is angry, they are not loving, and if they are loving, they do not get angry. Often, deep love is understood as not getting angry, while intense anger is understood as not loving. Moreover, “anger” may generally be thought of as something bad. Because of this, when we hear the words “God is love,” we may naturally think, “God is not one who gets angry.” What about you?

What does the Bible teach?

Let us read verse 10 of today’s passage.

***10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.***

In the latter half of verse 10, it says that the Son—namely, Jesus Christ—was sent as an “atoning sacrifice.” This is not the only place where Jesus Christ is described as an atoning sacrifice; we also see it in the letter to the Romans.

“To atone” means to **bring someone who is emotional or angry back to a calm state.**

In other words, if Jesus is an “atoning sacrifice,” it means that someone is angry. Who is angry? **God.** What is God angry about? Sin (Romans 1:18), and sinners (John 3:36). God does get angry.

Here, I would like to think about the difference between human anger and God’s anger.

Human anger is often biased by personal emotions and self-interest. At times, it is an unpleasant and hostile feeling toward personal insult or harm. Even when anger is based on justice, we tend to exceed proper limits and become excessively angry.

What about God’s anger? God’s anger is also an emotion, but it is not uncontrollable. God’s anger is not a capricious emotion, but a **willful and sovereign judgment.** In other words, while God’s anger belongs to the realm of emotion, its essence is a legitimate and intentional response arising from God’s righteous nature. It never goes beyond proper bounds.

God's anger flows from His own holy righteousness; therefore, if there were no sin, God would not be angry. If everything were right, there would be no anger.

However, sadly, the Bible says in Romans that "all have sinned...". The sin referred to here is not only actually stealing someone's property or causing harm, but also being self-centered and attempting to become one's own god.

All people are in such a state and are under God's wrath. The "atoning sacrifice" resolves this sin and appeases God.

Yet, astonishingly, God prepared a way to bear that wrath Himself: the atoning sacrifice, Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that He came into the world for sinners—the very objects of wrath who rebel, oppose, and turn against Him—and that through Him, those who believe in His name are given "life." Let us read verse 9.

*9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.*

*By this, the love of God was revealed to us.*

## **<2. God's Love — From God Himself>**

It is written, "By this, the love of God was revealed to us."

What kind of love is God's love here? When we say "love," the range is very broad. Let us think about it a little from the words found in Scripture: "Love is patient, love is kind" (1 Corinthians 13:4).

With this in mind, I would like to consider the difference between human love and God's love.

Setting aside the parent-child relationship, when people love others—that is, when they are kind and patient—under what circumstances does that happen? Can we be kind and patient toward all people at all times? Probably there are not many who could answer, "I can."

We tend to be kinder and more patient toward those who need help, those who are close to us, and those who are humble and know how to be grateful. For example, if the other person is very rough, an

unchanging evildoer, or someone who provokes anger, it may be quite difficult to love that person constantly and to treat them with kindness and patience.

In this way, I think that human “love” has something like invisible conditions for acceptance.

In many cases, this is deeply related to “the state of the person we are trying to love.” If the other person meets our “conditions for being loved,” we can naturally—or with some effort—love them and treat them kindly and patiently. However, when those conditions are not met, it becomes difficult to behave with kindness and patience. And I feel that these “conditions for acceptance” differ from person to person.

God's love is decisively different from human love. One of those differences is that it is a love that does not change depending on the condition of the other person.

God does not love us because we are righteous or because we are good children. Rather, the Bible tells us that “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

There is only one reason God loves us: because **God Himself is love.**

God's love flows out from God's very nature.

If it is permissible to use an illustration and compare God to the sun:

The sun shines warmly on all things. Whether what is illuminated is a flower, mud, or an animal, it pours out the same light. It does not say, “I will shine on the flower because it needs it,” or “I will not shine on the mud because it is meaningless.” The sun's warm light does not depend on the condition of what is being illuminated; it comes from the sun itself.

In the same way, God's love overflows from God Himself.

That love is poured out on all people.

Even on those who remain stubborn after receiving that love, on the ungrateful, on those who say, “I don't need God,” God continues to pour out unconditional love without change.

To summarize so far: the reason God gets angry is because of human sin. The reason God loves is because God Himself is love.

### <3. The Life That Has Been Given>

This God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to us and gave us “life.”

The Bible says:

*9a He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. (NIV)*

Some may wonder at the words “that we might live through him,” thinking, “What? Don’t we already have life?” After all, we breathe, move, touch, feel, and live.

However, the “life” spoken of here is spiritual life, which is given through believing in the Son, Jesus Christ. The Bible says that knowing “the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent” is eternal life. And those who have been given this “life” display a certain characteristic: love—brotherly love.

In fact, John deals very strictly with whether this “love” is present or not.

#### **1 John 4:7–8 (NIV)**

*7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.*

*8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

It clearly says here, “Whoever does not love does not know God.”

In other words, John is saying that without this love, even if one claims to believe in God, it is false, and the faith itself is empty—because this love is the evidence of “life.”

### <4. The Bond of Love>

“Love one another” is the new command that God has given us. Earlier, I said that human love comes with “conditions for acceptance.” Then what about this command?

It does not say,

“Love one another if you get along,”

“Love one another if you can talk well together,”

or “Love one another if you are capable.”

The Bible teaches that all people are lacking, imperfect, and fallen before God’s righteousness. Yet strangely, while we confess with our mouths, “I am lacking,” we have a habit of instantly judging our brothers and sisters by standards such as can/cannot and right/wrong.

(This is my own experience.) Certainly, there are situations where one side is actually wrong. But what is troublesome is that even those who believe they are on the “right” side may try to correct the other person in a way that lacks love.

They may use knowledge, experience, and theology like weapons, build up logic, and use their perceived superiority to force the other person toward the “right direction.”

Perhaps there was even good intention—to “lead them efficiently to what is right.” But looking back, when I ask myself whether it was truly in accordance with God’s will, I feel that it was not.

We have weaknesses. We cannot completely control even the unconscious areas within us. Without realizing it, thoughts of “trying to become god ourselves” may arise. No matter how careful we are, there are times when dissatisfaction wells up toward our brothers and sisters.

Paul does not deny this human weakness.

**Colossians 3:13–14 (NIV)**

*13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone.*

*Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

*14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

Paul assumes the reality that grievances arise. He is not saying, “If you are a Christian, you should not have any dissatisfaction.” Rather, even if there is dissatisfaction, he tells us to forgive one another, and over all of it, “put on love.”

In other words, love is the power that leads everything to completion.

I struggled for a long time with how to express what this “loving one another” really means. I can understand God’s awesome wrath and His boundless love. But how can “love one another” be rephrased? I simply could not write this part. To be honest, perhaps my own practice of loving one another had not been very rich. There is, of course, the aspect of “being good to others,” but I felt there was something more that could not be expressed by that alone.

Seeing me agonize over this, one staff member said to me, “Doesn’t loving one another mean treating one another as precious?”

I thought, “Yes—that’s exactly it.”

To treat one another as “precious beings” in the Lord—this, surely, is the core of loving one another. Even when there are moments we cannot be patient, moments when we feel irritated, moments when dissatisfaction arises—at the end, put on love. Love. Cherish. I believe that is what Paul is saying.

When I think about it carefully, I would like to say that in this matter I have been “the one who has patiently loved and cherished others,” but in reality, it has been the complete opposite. Rather, despite being someone who easily irritates others, wounds others, and possesses an unchanging stubbornness (and surely many things I have not yet noticed about myself), I have realized that I am the one who has been borne with, loved, and cherished by others.

Not only have I received unconditional love from God through Jesus, but I have also been treated in the same way by many brothers and sisters in the Lord, fellow believers. Embarrassingly enough, I think I have only now come to realize this.

### **1 John 4:11–12 (NIV)**

*11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*

*12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.*

God has loved us with unconditional love and has given us “life.” Therefore, as we look up to that grace with gratitude, we want to be people who love one another.

Of course, we are lacking, imperfect, and at times distorted. Yet when we know the “life” given to us through Jesus Christ and love one another on that foundation, God’s love is brought to completion within us.

We are strongly moved to desire to be people who cherish our brothers and sisters.

### **<Conclusion>**

We were originally people placed under God’s wrath. Yet God deeply loved us and gave us His Son, Christ. God is love. By receiving Christ, we have received “life.”

This love of God gives birth to a kind of “brotherly love” that we could never have imagined before. We who once could love others only according to our own standards are now touched by unconditional love and are being transformed.

As we spend this season of Advent, let us remember the “life” we have received from Christ. Let us desire to walk as those who live by the love that this life produces—loving and cherishing our fellow believers not based on their condition or value, but on the “life” God has given them.

Let us pray.