

1 John 4

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[0 : 00] So I'm due to 1 John 4, 7, 12, or 8, it's on page 1023 if you can go to church Bible.

Thank you.

They were the most terrifying of all. Now I do think church ministers and the media do need a little bit of a makeover, don't they? The image of church ministers is, well, it's like a very permanent useless, one of the three.

And we need a makeover. Now the church of Jesus Christ has successfully given God a makeover, hasn't it, in the last few centuries. And so God has been redesigned.

God has been given a very fashionable and a very understandable makeover. And I say it's understandable because I do think it is difficult to believe in a God of power and a God of love.

[1 : 27] At the start of the 21st century. If we think back to the last hundred years, it was one of unparalleled and unmitigated personal misery. Tyranny, torture, tragedy.

Genocide and Holocaust. Poverty, environmental abuse. And I think that partly in response to that, there's been an avalanche of unbelief in the church.

And the main theological project of the last 150 years has been to renovate God's image, really through paper and scissors. A cut and paste job. So, and the intent has been to remove from God all those things that we would consider negative.

And so we replace God's wrath with his slight disapproval. We replace his love with a tolerance of all things.

And the argument is that tailor-make a God who will not make any of you feel uncomfortable. Who will you welcome at any polite to the table conversation. The problem is, when the Christian faith comes face to face with suffering and the love of God.

[2 : 40] The Bible does not offer you any neat, tidy and easy answers. When it comes to suffering and the love of God, it is not possible to tweet an answer that is adequate.

Instead, the Bible offers us the Son of God nailed to a cross, dying in pain and in our place. The cross is not only a place of great redemption.

He prays God for that. But what I hope we're seeing is that the cross is the place of great revelation. It's not just the place of hope. The cross is a place of hope.

It's the place of forgiveness. But it's also the instrument through which we see and understand God. And through which we see and understand life in this world.

And that is why when we turn to this remarkable letter of 1 John, which we're about to study in house groups. The apostle tells us two things. And they are so simple. And they are so complete. And they reveal God to us more deeply than you can imagine.

[3 : 42] So in chapter 1, it's famous, isn't it? If you could, if you've been in church at all, the apostle tells us that God is light. In him there is no darkness at all.

That's chapter 1 and verse 5. That is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He's a God of indescribable holiness. And righteousness.

And purity. And beauty. He's unsullied. He does not have mixed motives and confusion. He is the source of light and truth. The one word used in the Bible to describe God more than any other is the word holy.

And because God is light, he delights to share himself. And to reveal himself with us. And when he does his revelation, it isn't just revelation.

It is good revelation. Just in case. Do you think that's a bit theoretical and abstract? The very next verse says, and does it, in him God is light and in him is no darkness.

[4 : 54] And what the very next verse says, the apostle says, what that means is you cannot have fellowship with God and live disobedient lives. That's the apostle does it. God is light.

Secondly, it means God is love, isn't it? Chapter 4. Apostle John speaks about love more than any other New Testament writer. And it's quite possible that he thought that we needed help in this area. So John continually and consistently urges us to love one another. He says, that is what it means to be a child of God. He says, if you claim, if you claim to have fellowship with God, you will love the people around you.

Look at verse 7 and 8. Beloved, let us love one another. For love is from God. And whoever loves has to be born of God and knows God. And anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love.

It's pretty sad, isn't it? God is love. Love is not one of God's qualities, amongst many. Love goes right to the essence and the core of his nature.

[6 : 04] So everything God does is loving. Every action, every word, every thought. His mercy, his grace, his purity. His holiness are all motivated by love.

And again, this is the furthest thing, is it, from being academic or theoretical. The apostle tells us that we talk about love endlessly.

We sing about it. As a culture, we're obsessed by it. We think we are experts on the topic. But in reality, he says, you don't have a clue. Verse 9. He says, in this is love.

Verse 9. In this, the love of God was made manifest amongst us. That God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him. So yes, we all experience love to one degree or another.

But apart from the death of Jesus Christ, we would never really know what love is. God himself defines what love is. You won't find a definition of love in a dictionary.

[7 : 09] Says John, you will find it at Calvary. God's love is active and visible. God does not love us in return for our love. He does not meet us halfway.

He doesn't wait for us to begin liking him. It is when we are at the sentence of death, he sent his son to die in our place. His love is conspicuous. It is visible.

It is unique. And it is being publicly manifested. It has been shown in a place of violence and bloodshed for those who did not love God. But it is when we come to verse 10 that we are taken to the deepest point.

Listen to these words. 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.

Propitiation is a personal turn. When someone has been wronged, and they are rightly angry and hurt, to propitiate them means to make some sort of offering to turn away their anger.

[8 : 22] It is the word used throughout the Bible that describes averting God's wrath by a sacrifice. And so if you are here regularly in church, you hear 1 John chapter 1.

1 John chapter 2. And verse 2 read over and over again as the assurance of pardon. We use it more than any other verse. He is the propitiation for our sins.

The problem is many of us are frightened of this word. And even actually some of the Bible translators are frightened of this word. So if you've got another version, it might say sacrifice of atonement or expiation or something like that.

Because the word propitiation has got pagan associations. The word propitiation was used in pagan religions. When God's anger, when the God's anger flared up in anger at something.

At some trivial, unpredictable moment. And they demand the God so that their anger be propitiated. And pagan religion is basically celestial commerce, isn't it?

[9 : 30] Where you manage and you manipulate the God by kind of cunning and bringing of offerings. But of course the God of the Bible is not like that. God is not some bad tempered child.

Therefore it comes as a real surprise to many people that this idea of propitiation runs right the way through the Old Testament and through the New Testament. But the idea of averting God's wrath by an offering.

It takes us to the heart of God's purpose for us. It takes us to the heart of the sacrifice and death of Jesus. So we know that we through Exodus and Leviticus.

But this very word is used in the Old Testament when a priest offers a sacrifice. For his own sins he would go inside the court. He would take an animal. He would lay his hands on the living animal.

And he would confess his sins. Transferring his sins to the animal. And when the animal was killed, God's anger, God's wrath was propitiated. That's what we read.

[10 : 35] But our difficulty with this is that our anger is almost always, isn't it? It is almost always selfish, petulant and spiteful. At least my anger is.

We do our best to keep our anger under control. But at the slightest provocation it bursts forward, doesn't it? And our anger wreaks havoc and destruction on those unlucky to be near us at the time. And it's very, very difficult for you and I to imagine an anger that is pure and righteous and holy. But God is light. And the wrath, the wrath of God is nothing than God's holy love confronted with evil. He recoils from sin. God's wrath is, if you like it, the reverse side of his holy love. He takes us deadly seriously.

And when there is sin, there will be wrath. It is his settled opposition. To all that is not right. And it reveals to us a God who is concerned all about that which is true and good and pure and right.

[11 : 42] And the Bible could not be clearer. But the Old and the New Testament testify to the terrifying reality of God's wrath. If you remove the wrath of God from God, you are no longer talking about the God of the Bible.

If you remove the wrath of God from God, you are no longer talking about the God of the Bible. You probably know there are two very popular ways of taking God's wrath away from him.

And the first is to say, the obvious one is that the Old Testament does talk about God's wrath. There are 500 times it is kindled and it is fierce.

But that's the God of the Old Testament. Some say the God of the New Testament is different. The God of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is a God of love and tenderness.

Well I think it's interesting that that is not a new idea. I think there is something new in that. It was first spouted by a fellow called Marcion in about 140 AD. And Marcion, well there was quite a lot of the Bible that he didn't like.

[12 : 49] He didn't like any reference to the Jews, so he took out the Old Testament. He didn't like the wrath of God. He took out the references, well he didn't like the Virgin's birth.

He took out those references. He didn't actually get the resurrection either. So he literally took a knife and he literally cut those sections out. And he presented a mutilated Christianity. It's called the Marcionite heresy.

And it rears its head probably every five years I would have thought. But you need a kind of special, don't you, narrow-minded view. You're kind of myopia to take this through.

You've got to ignore the fact that a God of the Old Testament is actually revealed as a God of tender mercy and compassion. You know that verse in Exodus where God reveals himself to Moses at Mount Sinai.

Before the people go into the land. And God says about himself this. The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. And you have to ignore that the one person in the Bible who speaks more clearly and who speaks more frequently about the reality of judgment than anyone else is the person of the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

[13 : 59] The other popular way to eradicate God's wrath is to say, well, wrath is an impersonal term. It's a kind of Christian karma.

Which explains why bad things happen in the world. But the Bible makes clear that the anger of God is deeply personal. And God is active throughout his creation.

And rather than it being a blind and personal force, the wrath of God is his love and his light confronted with evil. The idea that God should not or cannot be angry is neither Christian nor is it biblical.

Rather it is making God again after our own image. A pale reflection of our fears. And it violates what the Bible says. It violates biblical revelation.

It empties the apostolic gospel. And it scoffs at God's holiness. But the biggest thing it does is it emasculates the love of God on the cross.

[15 : 02] It makes it milky white. Without any offence. You see, that is why the fact that God is love is so important.

God is not by nature wrathful. You saw that there quickly. God is by nature love. Wrath. Wrath is not the first word. Nor is it the last word about God.

In fact, the book of Isaiah describes his wrath as God's strange work. His alien work. It is only because it has been aroused by our sin. And that is why the cross is at the heart of our understanding about God.

Because the cross is that perfect combination of the love of God for us. As well as his opposition to all that is wrong and all that is evil.

You see, the cross is not just another sacrifice. As Jesus dies, he takes the wrath of God to himself. Jesus is our propitiation.

[16:07] Think about it this way. The problem of our guilt is not so much our subjective feelings of guilt. Even though they are very real, aren't they? The problem is those things that we've done that have aroused God's wrath and our disobedience.

Create a distance between us and God. But the real obstacle between us and God is not our feelings towards God. But his towards us.

Yes, we are estranged from God. But God is estranged from us. And here's the miracle of God's love. It is God who provides the way.

It is God who provides the way so that his wrath might be satisfied. And you and I can come back. You and I can come back into fellowship and friendship and reconciliation and communion with him. And God doesn't just reach out and find some third party bystander and sacrifice him. In the person of Jesus Christ. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.

[17:16] Remember in the Old Testament when Elijah stood against the prophets of Baid and Elijah. And he set up an offering with a bull on wood and on the stone. And he put buckets and buckets and buckets of water, gallons of the stuff.

Gathered round in a trench. To run the sacrifice. And when Elijah called on God to send out fire from heaven. The fire came down and it utterly consumed. Not just the offering.

But the wood and the rocks and the dust and the water in the trench. And as Jesus dies on the cross. And the fire of God's wrath comes down on him.

Not only is the offering consumed. But the offering consumes the wrath of God. And God's wrath is exhausted in Christ Jesus.

In this is love. Not that we loved God. But that he loved us. And sent his son to be propitiation for our sins. And that is why the cross reveals the light of God.

[18:19] That God is light. And the love of God. That God is love. It is where steadfast love and faithfulness meet. It is where righteousness and peace kiss each other.

I've given this illustration not to deny the bushfire. And the family that's called the bushfire is coming. And the roads are blocked. There's nowhere to go. So the only thing they can do is they've got a field next door to their farm.

And they've burned the field completely. They've burned it to the ground. And so when the bushfire comes. They go into the middle of the field and they huddle together.

And the fire passes them by. Because the field has already consumed and burned. And so it is for us. There is one place and one place alone.

That is safe for us against the wrath of God. And it is the only place where God's wrath has already burned. And been exhausted.

[19:25] And it is the death of Jesus Christ. Jesus is our propitiation. Praise God. The wrath of God has been averted from us. And what that means is this.

That if you trust in Jesus' death tonight. You are utterly, utterly, utterly forgiven. He remembers our sin no more. And we are in peace with God.

And there is no condemnation. And that is the wonder of God's love. He takes what we deserve. And he gives what we don't deserve.

He suffers the wrath of God. So that now there is nothing nor creation. That can separate us from the love of God. No weakness. No sin. No depression. No guilt. There is nothing in our past.

There is nothing in the future. There is nothing in the present. There is nothing below. There is nothing above. There is not life. Not death itself. And the Christian life is a daily journey.

[20:21] Where we struggle more deeply. to understand the utter security. And unconditionality of God's love for us. And as we live in that love.

We are able to love one another. And what this passage is teaching us. Is that the source and spring of that love for each other. Is the cross of Jesus Christ.

And if you wonder whether God really loves you. Don't look around in your life. It says the Bible.

That will teach you something. But ultimately you and I need to look at the cross.

Of Jesus Christ. And we go there. And we see what God did for you. And why. And you be gripped by his love. Or if you are finding it difficult to love.

That very difficult person. Who just doesn't understand you. Again. We are to go to the cross of Jesus Christ. And we are to see what he has done. And it is there. That at the cross.

[21 : 20] We see what love is. It is giving ourselves for the spiritual good of that other person. And it is often. And most usually costly. Seeking the other's best.

And this evening as we come to this communion table. And we give thanks. And we remember. And we celebrate.

Thankfully for Jesus' death for us. We lift our hearts to God. Who is love. And we give him thanks. And praise. And adoration for what he has done.

And we pray that we like his grip. Despite his love again. Let's pray.