

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

A Meditation on 1 John 4:7-12

As the movie *Brian's Song* depicted so well, the friendship between Gale Sayers and Brian Piccolo deepened into one of the best friendships in sports history. During the 1969 season, Piccolo was diagnosed with cancer. He fought to finish the season, but was in the hospital more than he was in the game. As often as possible, Gale Sayers flew to be beside his best friend.

They had planned, with their wives, to sit together at the Professional Football Writers annual dinner in New York, where Sayers was to be given the George S. Halas award as the most courageous player in pro football. But Piccolo was confined to his bed at home, because he was so ill.

As Sayers stood to receive the award, tears came to his eyes. The gifted athlete had this to say as he took the trophy, "You flatter me by giving me this award, but I tell you here and now that I accept it for Brian Piccolo. Brian Piccolo is the man of courage who should receive the George S. Halas award. I love Brian Piccolo, and I'd like you to love him. Tonight, when you hit your knees, please ask God to love him too."

What obvious and unashamed love Gale Sayers had for his friend, Brian Piccolo. It is this type of love that should be common place among the people of God.

"Love one another" is the repeated refrain of our passage (1 Jn. 4:7-12). It is also worth highlighting that John doesn't allow for a pious rhetoric that says "I love God" without their being corresponding love for one's brother. In fact, John says that such a person is a liar (4:20). "Whoever loves God must also love his brother" (vs. 21). Consider three overlapping reasons why we should love one another.

First, God is love, and we should imitate Him. We find the phrase "God is love" (vv. 8, 16) mentioned twice for emphasis. This is the logical place to begin, since the source and origin of *all* love is God.

Observe that John says, "God is love" and not "God is loving." The latter could be said of another human being, but the former can only be said of God. John is saying something far more profound and fundamental than "God is a loving God." He is saying that God's very nature is one of love; therefore it is impossible for God not to be loving. All that God does is loving, because God *is* love.

But let us beware of thinking that this characteristic of love is in conflict with any of His other attributes; God is a unitary being. In other words, God never sets aside one of His attributes in order to exercise another. We must not think that at times God will be loving, but at other times He will exercise His justice and manifest wrath. He may manifest His wrath at times, but in doing so He has not ceased to be loving. No, God's justice is a loving justice, or we could say His justice is loving. As husbands, wives, parents, friends, etc., we should ask if love permeates all we do.

Second, God gives us His love, which empowers us to love one another. John exhorts us, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God" (vs. 7). Here's the flow of thought: "God is love. Love comes from God. And it comes to those of us who have been born of God and know God. Therefore, we ought to love one another with the love that God has given us." Put bluntly: If we don't love one another, we don't know God, because God is love (vs. 8). Similarly, I. Howard Marshall states, "A person cannot come into a real relationship with a loving God without being transformed into a loving person."

Third, God loved us first. John says, "We love because he first loved us" (vs. 19). There are many different ways in which God's love for us is manifest, but the supreme manifestation was when "God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him." Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another (vs. 9, 11). John Stott comments, "The historical manifestation of God's love in Christ not only assures us of his love for us, but lays upon us the obligation to love one another. No-one who has been to the cross and seen God's immeasurable and unmerited love displayed there can go back to a life of selfishness. Indeed, the implication seems to be that our love should resemble his love: *since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another*" (John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John*, p. 166).

"No one has ever seen God," but if we love one another, John seems to say, God will reveal Himself to others through that love (vs. 12). Meditate on that: Our love can reveal the God of love.

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