

# Children of God

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Date: 12 February 2017

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn back then to the portion of scripture that we read, the first letter of John, chapter 3, and reading again at the beginning of the chapter.

See what kind of love the Father has given to us that we should be called children of God and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know Him.

Beloved, we are God's children now and what we will be has not yet appeared, but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He is.

Particularly the opening words in the first verse. See what kind of love, as the A.B. said, see what manner of love the Father has given to us that we should be called children of God.

See what kind of love. The first letter of John was written from Ephesus and it was written to the church in Ephesus.

[ 1 : 29 ] But not just to the church in Ephesus, but also to the other churches throughout what was called at that time H.M.I.

That is what we now nowadays know as Turkey. That's quite an interesting fact, isn't it, that when you look at the list of churches in Paul's time and in New Testament times, throughout what is today Turkey, that there is not a single one left now.

That's something that's a sobering thought and perhaps a thought that we should bear in mind as we look at the history of the church throughout time.

That's a side issue. See what kind of love the Father has given to us. The Apostle John is often referred to as the Apostle of Love.

There are some who dispute that the writer of this letter and the other two letters which follow is in fact the Apostle John.

[ 2 : 42 ] Some who think that it's a different John. But all you have to do is look at the beginning of the first chapter and you see immediately that it can be none other than the Apostle John.

He says in chapter 1 and verse 1, That which was from the beginning which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands concerning the word of life.

And that is a personal testimony, of course, from John of the Christ that he had heard, that he had seen, that he had looked upon and that he had touched.

And therefore I find it very hard to understand why such a fuss is made by some people in denying the authorship of this letter to the Apostle.

It seems eminently clear to me from not just that verse but from throughout, as I hope I'll make clear that this is the Apostle John who is writing this.

[ 3 : 50 ] But there is a difference between this letter and the second and the third letters. The second and the third letters, if you're familiar with them, people often don't spend much time on them.

They're very short. But they are personal letters. They are written to actual individuals. Again, some of course dispute that. You look at the third letter, the elder to the beloved Gaius.

And in the second letter, the elder to the elect lady and her children. And some maintain, of course, that that refers to the whole church, the elect lady and her children.

But the majority opinion is that he is writing to an individual person. And the Gaius that he is writing to in the third letter is virtually unknown. We have no idea who that Gaius actually was.

But the tone of the letters are completely different. And that is what makes it clear, of course, that this first epistle is an epistle to the churches.

[ 4 : 52 ] And the other two are passionate. And I want to look, first of all, at who is actually writing this letter.

The Apostle John himself. And secondly, to look at the subject that he has throughout this letter. The theme is love. But the theme is love for a particular purpose.

And we'll come back to that in a moment. And thirdly, what he means in verse 2 by, We are God's children now. And what we will be has not yet appeared.

Which is the theme of adoption. And we'll come to look at that, time permitting, as we go on. So having established then who the writer actually is, it is interesting to look at the character and the person of the Apostle John.

He's always held up as the Apostle of love. And yet, if you have a look through the Scriptures, particularly through the Scriptures of the New Testament and the Gospels, you will find that that was not always the case.

[ 6 : 13 ] When Jesus meets him for the first time, John and his brother, James, coming from Bethsaida, they were followers of John the Baptist, he calls them the Sons of Thunder, Boanerges, which seems like a strange name.

Why would he actually call them that? Until we see him. A little bit later on, and it's only Luke who actually quotes this, in Luke chapter 9, he remembers when Jesus and his disciples are going round various villages, and there's a village of the Samaritans that doesn't want Jesus and his disciples to enter there.

And who is it that says, Lord, shall we call fire down from heaven and destroy them? It is none other than this James and John, the two brothers, the sons of Zebedee.

Fishermen, originally. But yet it seems that the whole family followed Jesus, because we find their mother. Now, most people surmise that the mother is actually the lady that we know in Scripture as Salome, that she appears several times by name in Scripture.

She was at the cross as well, and she was one of the women who followed and ministered to Jesus. And we find her mother, their mother, Salome, if that was her name, in the Gospel of Luke, again coming to Jesus and desiring a favour.

[ 7 : 59 ] And Jesus says, oh, what do you want? And she says, well, I'd like you to grant that my two sons, James and John, will sit, one on the right hand and one on the left hand in your kingdom.

Now, you might think, of course, that would be a wonderful thing for a mother to ask for her children. But it showed, of course, at that stage, her lack of understanding.

And it showed John and James' lack of understanding of the servant role that our Lord had come to pray, and of the servant role that you and I, as believers, should be carrying out in our various offices because of love.

You see, John, like all of us, like you and I, like James, had to learn humility. And it's a hard lesson for us to bear.

But we'll come back to that later. Perhaps there's another reason why John is known as the beloved disciple.

[ 9 : 17 ] We see in the Gospel in chapter 13, we are told that John lay in Jesus' lap. More modern versions put it, his head rested on his chest.

And it appears that at the Last Supper, that at some point in the Last Supper, or in the Passover meal, as it should be more correctly described, that John was reclining, and again, bear in mind, of course, the culture of the times, the meals were eaten sitting on low couches round the table.

And somehow, John seems to have reclined in such a way, and he refers to himself, and is referred to there, as the disciple whom Jesus loved.

Why was that? Well, there are many who think that the reason for that was that John was the youngest of all the disciples.

And of course, it raises an interesting question, doesn't it? If John was pointed out as the disciple whom Jesus loved, does that mean that he didn't love the other disciples?

[ 10 : 29 ] Well, of course, of course not. He was thinking immediately, oh, of course, he loved them all equally. So, why does it specifically state that John was the beloved disciple?

The only reason that we can perhaps come to is that because he was the youngest, and possibly, therefore, the most vulnerable, if I could use that word in its original sense, therefore, he was the one to whom Jesus paid special attention.

And you notice that among that special attention, the inner circle, those three disciples who were with Jesus in most of the things that he went through that the others did not see, who were they?

Peter, James, and John. Excuse me. And if you see then, and you start to look at the things that John experienced, you see how privileged he was as a member of that inner trio right from the very beginning.

He was at the transfiguration. He saw the transfiguration. He saw our Lord speaking to Moses and Elijah. Of course, the three disciples had no idea who Jesus was speaking to.

[12:06] It must have been Jesus himself who told them that it was Moses and Elijah. How would they have recognized the two Old Testament figures who had been dead for so long?

But yet, remember, of course, that Moses is there representing the law and Elijah is there representing the prophets. And so, the transfiguration, something that they did not speak about until after Jesus had been crucified.

Scripture tells us that they kept these things, they were told to keep these things to themselves. He was with Christ, and with Steve, and with Christ from the very beginning.

they saw many, many miracles. They saw Lazarus being raised to life. And it's only John who is mentioned as being at the cross.

Now, that doesn't mean that the other disciples weren't there. Very probably they were, but are far away, so as not to be identified with Jesus, and therefore perhaps being taken into captivity as well.

[13:24] But John is boldly at the foot of the cross. And who is with him? Well, we see that various of the women are with him as well, including Salome, but including also Mary, the Lord's mother.

people ask and say, well, you know, where was Joseph through all this? Almost certainly Joseph had died many years before.

There's no mention of Joseph in scripture after Jesus is 11, 12 years old, and so it's surmised by all the commentators that Joseph must have died.

And that is why Jesus is referred to as the carpenter, because he is the one, of course, who kept the business going before he begins his ministry at 30 years old.

And again, I'm digressing a little bit here. And you remember that our Lord looks down from the cross and he asks John, among the seven saints of the cross, he mentions and says to John, to take Mary and to look after her.

[14:39] Behold thy mother. And it would seem historically that John in fact did so. We, the historian Nicephorus writing, in the 9th century, quite a long time after this, tells us that Mary lived in John's house for 11 years afterwards, before the persecution came and they were forced to flee from Jerusalem.

And again, tradition will tell you that Mary and Mary Magdalene fled from the land of Israel to the island of Cyprus. the people buried in a church in Larnica in Cyprus.

If you ever go on holiday there, it's worth visiting. Whether the story is through or not, I have no idea, but I found it quite fascinating when we were there to see the tomb of Mary in a church in Larnica.

So this is the John who takes and looms after Mary. And of course, like the other disciples, when the persecution begins in Jerusalem, is forced to flee from there.

And you remember, of course, that John is exiled eventually to the island of Patmos. And it is there that he writes the revelation, the apocalypse, what he sees, the vision that he is given to see, to record and to bring to the churches.

[16:16] And it's after this, after he has returned from Patmos, during the persecution of Diocletia, that he then is able to return to Ephesus under a new emperor who is a little bit more lenient at first.

And John lives out the rest of his life in Ephesus. two very interesting things about John in his final years.

Of the twelve apostles, not including Judas, of course, of the twelve apostles, he is the only one who dies a natural death of old age.

He was something, somewhere in his late nineties, when he died, possibly older. And the historian of the great church father, Irenaeus, tells us that even in his old age, he was carried by the young men of the congregation into the church in Ephesus, when he could no longer walk in order to be present at the services.

So this is the John who is writing this letter. chapter. And the purpose of his letter is very, very clear. If you follow through at the beginning, and again you know something of what is going on in history at this particular time, verse 7 tells you clearly, little children, let no one deceive you.

[ 17 : 49 ] And in several other parts of the letter, he mentions the same thing. And you remember that John's purpose in writing his gospel, and the majority of commentators believe that he was writing his gospel round about the same time as he was writing the letters.

And remember the purpose of the gospel of John is different from the other three, of course. The other three are synoptic gospels, but John's gospel has one purpose from the beginning, to show the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ, to show that he is God.

And that is the focus, why many things are in the Bible of John, which appears in others, and why he records things that do not appear in the other three gospels. And the reason for that was that a theory had sprung up in the churches in Ephesus, and was spreading, and it was a heresy, and it was causing a large number of people to not only lose their faith, but to leave the church.

And this is what, again, without going into huge detail about it, this is what later became known as Gnosticism. G-N-O-S-T. Gnosticism.

Which was basically a belief started by a man named Serinthus, who said that Jesus Christ is not enough. You need something more than Jesus Christ.

[ 19 : 19 ] You need some kind of mystical experience before you can actually be sure of being saved. What he was doing was combining, of course, Greek metaphilosophy along with the strengths of Christianity that he had as well.

And he goes on, and Gnosticism goes on, to actually deny the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is because of that that John writes this gospel, and that he writes this letter to the churches with this word, little children.

And with little children, as he uses frequently throughout the letter, he is, of course, referring to the idea of people who are young in the faith, whose faith is sort of still a little bit shaky.

And he is showing to them the love with which they are loved, by the Father, by the Son, and by the Holy Spirit.

This is the second theme that appears in this verse. See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God, and so we are.

[ 20 : 44 ] There are four words in Greek for love. In English, we only have one, and it's a bit confusing when you say things like, I love mince and potatoes and I love my wife.

They're certainly not the same thing at all. It would mean the same thing at all. But the Greek is much clearer on this. There are words like philios, which represent the love of parents for children, storki, which means the love for family, and of course the word eros, which we'll all be familiar with and the word erotic, where we get the English word erotic from, that is sexual love.

But the word that is used throughout here for love, and it's the same word that is used in the gospel, is the Greek word agape. agape. Now, agape is a different kind of love.

It's a sacrificial love. It's a love that puts others first. If you look at Paul's letter to the Ephesians in Ephesians 5, when Paul is speaking of the love between the husband and the wife, and it's a passage that is very often used in marriage and wedding ceremonies, well, it used to be a little bit, still used service.

Many of these customs have changed, but it used to be the passage for a wedding ceremony. It is the word agape that is used there. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church.

[ 22 : 20 ] How did he love the church? By giving his own life for the church. And that is why Paul says at the end of that chapter, this is a great mystery, he says, that I speak of Christ and his child.

And this is the same word that's used here. See what kind of agape love the Father has given to us. What kind of sacrificial love?

Well, the theme of love in scripture is, of course, a very wide theme. A couple of weeks ago, we had a sermon, I believe you had it here from our own minister as well, that love is one of the gifts of spirit.

But it's not that kind of love that really is being referred to here. See what kind of love the Father has given to us. But to look first of all at where this love comes from.

If the Father gave it to us, then this love must exist in the Trinity. This is the love with which the Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Father.

[ 23 : 39 ] It's the same love with which the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit act together. And it's going backwards and forwards between the three persons in the Godhead all the time.

what the theologians call reciprocal love. And there are several amazing things about this love.

It never increases because it cannot. And it never diminishes because it cannot. You see when you think of human love and you think for example of how you and I have gone through the process of love.

Well, I assume you've gone through the process of love at some point. All of us have been loved by someone, even if it's only our dog. But all of us have experienced some kind of love.

And yet there are moments in our lives that we're loved blossoms. Everything is seen with hearts and roses and Valentine's Day coming up and all the rest of it. And there are all moments that you can't stand the side of her.

[ 24 : 55 ] Whatever. It happens because our love, of course, is an emotion. And the problem with human emotions is that they come and go.

They're not constant. That's why we speak nowadays, or we used to speak, maybe since I retired from teaching, it's no longer fashionable, but we used to speak so much about emotional intelligence.

Because your emotions affect your intelligence. You don't think the same way when you're angry as you do when you're happy. And you certainly don't think the same way when you're in love.

They say that love is blind. But what happens after a number of years and your eyes are actually opened? do things change? Love is no longer an emotion, it's a decision.

Oh, yes, of course, there are deep feelings there as well. But the kind of love, and I often wonder about this, what on earth did my wife see in me when she fell in love with me?

[ 26 : 12 ] I've never really figured that one out. I've asked her many times, and I get facetious answers, etc., and so on. But, you know, and she asked, what did you see in me?

And I said, oh, you know. And you think, well, okay, that was the way it started. But then, it's not the wrapping that matters, it's what's inside the package.

And you keep looking at that, and you think over years and years and years and years, the packaging has changed enormously, both mine and hers, and yet the love has increased.

The love is deeper. Why? Because, again, it is, of course, not just a physical union, it's a spiritual union, it's a mental union, and it's a union together in the body of Christ.

And when that comes in, the love with which we love, those who are closely associated to us, is an impossible thing to describe.

[ 27 : 22 ] John is going further than that, and he said, see what kind of love the Father has given us. That's not a love that depends on emotion. Very interesting question to debate, and you might like to argue about it at home.

does God have emotions? And some will say immediately, well, of course he does, otherwise we who are created in this image, even can't.

All right, suddenly God gets angry, and acts illogically at times because of his anger, of course not. Does that mean that God at times loves you and I less because we're naughty, etc., like we do with our children, or does there are a lot of times when he broke?

And so you come into a very difficult debate on that one. Does God have emotions? I'll leave that one with you. I'll put it to you in questions I can't answer with you so that you can think about them. But this love is different. You see, this love does not depend on emotion. This love is the passion of God.

[ 28 : 36 ] Isn't that what we are taught? God is love. A love that never increases, that never changes. A love that never diminishes.

And that is the love with which you are dying. If we are believers in the love of Jesus Christ, that is the love with which we are loved.

that is an amazing thought when you think of it. You and I have done nothing to deserve this love.

In fact, quite the opposite. If you are anything like me, for years and years you rejected this love.

You didn't want to know about it. And it wasn't you who made the first steps towards the love of God.

It's not what the Lord tells us, that no one can come to the Father unless he is drawn through the cards of this love.

[ 29 : 45 ] It is God's electing love who draws us to him. Paul puts it a different way and he says that God first loved us.

John says the same. God first loved us. Why? Have you ever sat down and wondered why it is that God loves you?

And at the same time realised that there are others, that God, and I say this with the deepest respect, that God does not love.

And that may sound a terrible thing to say, and some people take umbrage at that and have words with me afterwards whenever I've said it. How can you say something like that? But yet that is the pattern that we see in election and God's scripture all the way through.

The love of God only applies to God's elect people. Yes, of course, we don't know who they are.

[ 31 : 01 ] There may be some even here this evening who are God's elect people but not yet converted. That's perfectly possible. I believe there are many unborn who are still part of the elect.

I believe there are elect in heaven who we never recognised as believers here on earth. Perhaps they were sacred believers. Who knows?

But God works in mysterious ways so that when he brings the church universal and the church catholic together, and the two words really mean the same catholic universal, when he brings it together at the final judgment, with all the saints clothed in righteousness, with their filthy rags washed away, dipped in the blood of the man, they will be there from every tongue.

John tells us that in the vision that he saw in Revelation, that they are there from every nation, and every night, and every tongue of the earth. And if you're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ this evening, you have security that you will be there.

What did you do to deserve it? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. You see, that's the difference between God's love and our love.

[ 32 : 34 ] We tend very much so. We love our children because of our children. The filial's love. But we tend to love them more, or at least we think we love them more, when they're good, and when they do well, and when they're naughty, etc.

We sleep. But it's just emotional again. Of course, deep down you do love, but God is not like that at all. You see, imagine if God got angry with you and I every time we sin, and every time we make a mistake.

But Scripture tells us that every sin deserves the wrath of God. How many times did you sin today? It's a hard question, isn't it? What was my sin today? Did I eat too much at lunchtime? Was I guilty of gluttony? Was I guilty of laziness by having an afternoon nap?

Snap? Nap? Did I switch off for five minutes during the morning sermon because my mind drifted away somewhere else? Was that a sin?

[ 33 : 48 ] When I presented this morning, perhaps like the presenters here, did I get a note flat somewhere wrong or didn't I put it in the right key or something? Are these all sins that God can get angry with us for?

Or maybe it's the sins of commission, of omission, the things that we didn't do that we should have gone. Instead of having a nap this afternoon, maybe I should have gone to visit some old lady along the road and shared God's word for that.

Maybe I should have been out on the street corner speaking to people. And the more we look at it, you see, we think, well, God's love does not depend on what we do.

See, that's an amazing thing. God's love does not depend on what we do. We cannot earn God's love. That is why so many people get so confused with what is really the doctrine of works.

What do I have to do to be saved? Wasn't that what the jailer said, the Philippian jail? What must I do? Well, you don't do anything.

[ 34 : 58 ] It's all been done. Unaccompanied. What you do is you believe. You come in faith to accept this gift of God that is given to you.

And you notice that this gift brings us into something else. This gift now enables us to be called the children of God.

The children of God. God's love. And so we are. This is what we refer to as the sonship of the believer. And again, forgive me ladies for using the universal term for it.

It implies, of course, sons and daughters, men and women, boys and girls. The sonship of the believer. Brought in and adopted into the family of God through the sacrifice of our elder brother.

Adoption, of course, is one of the key doctrines. You find Paul spending several chapters on it in the letter to the Romans. But John is referring to it here as well.

[ 36 : 08 ] That we should be called children of God and so we are. And in verse two he says, Beloved, we are God's children now and what we will be has not yet appeared.

But we know that when he appears we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is. What does adoption actually mean?

Well, if you are going to adopt a child nowadays there is a legal process that you have to go through in order to do this.

Years ago, in Lewis, it was quite common, and perhaps in many parts of Scotland, that in big families, the first and the second child were farmed out to the grandparents to be looked after. And they lived perhaps with the grandparents or even with other relatives. But they were never adopted. Because adopted means that you have to go through a judicial legal process whereby the person being adopted is taken and given the full rights of sonship in the family into which he is adopted.

[ 37 : 26 ] In New Testament times, it was very common that slaves who had served a long service in a particular household would be adopted into the family.

a price had to be paid and a legal brief was drawn up in which they then had the same rights as the children born in the household.

you and I have been adopted in the same way through a judicial act. You see, God's justice led to the Lord Jesus Christ paying our debt for sin on the cross.

That was the judicial act. There was a sentence carried out that every sin dissolves the wrath and punishment of God.

And this was agreed in love before the foundation of the world, before man was created, that the Son would pay the price in love for the sins of his people.

[ 38 : 46 ] That's quite an amazing thought. Long before you were born in electing love, you were part of this contract between the Father and the Son, that the Son would pay the price for your sin and my sin on the cross of Calvary.

God and yet you had nothing, you have done nothing to deserve it. Done nothing. The American author Philip Yancey puts it like this, he says, there is nothing you can do to make God love you more and nothing you can do to make God love you less.

because that love does not depend on what you and I do. That love depends, that adoption depends on the work of the cross, on the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's quite something, isn't it, to think about the fact that our Lord died for you before you were born, before you were even conceived, that he knew you from all eternity, and that he paid the price on the cross of Calvary for you.

years and years before you would even come to know and be aware of his love. That is a sobering God, that in all eternity you were elected in love as part of the covenant that our Lord had with his people.

[ 40 : 51 ] And that is the case for every believer. Those who have come to faith and those who still have to come to faith. That is the case for every believer.

And that what our Lord says, that greater love hath no man than this, that he laid down his life for his friends. In John 15, and you are my friends, if you keep my commandments, he says.

And you and I come and we say, Lord, we can't keep your commandments. We sin daily in thought, word and deed. We fail in everything that we should do.

And he says, I know. That's why I took your sin. That's why I went to the cross. Because I know that you cannot keep the law.

But I can. I could. do it. That's why I came. To sacrifice my blood. That's why I came to fulfill the sign of the blood that flows through the Old Testament from the start to the beginning.

[ 42 : 03 ] From the sacrificial skins that Adam and Eve were coated in before or when they were thrown out of the garden. see the blood of the Passover and the first Passover in Egypt.

The blood that had to be dumped on the lintels of the door. There was no point in having the blood unless the blood was applied. It had to be applied to the lintels.

And see the blood throughout the Old Testament in all the sacrifices for sin. The blood that was sprinkled once a year on the altar.

And then taken in on the Ark of the Covenant. And you remember that on the mercy seat the angels the cherubim swings. That the cherubim are looking down on the mercy seat.

Looking down on the blood. And that the blood covers the law. The tables of the law within the Ark of the Covenant. That's the pattern of the Old Testament.

[ 43 : 08 ] It takes you through all the way. with the Messiah who was to come. Until you come to the cross. And this is what John is saying.

We are God's children now. And what we will be has not yet appeared. And I'll just leave you with a couple of thoughts on those words.

What we will do has not yet appeared. of all the■■■. It's John himself who was given, who was given in the book of Revelation a vision, a partial vision of what we will be.

Taken into glory. At the day of judgment our bodies were erected and united to Christ, clothed in the fine linen of the saints, washed in the blood of the Lamb, to be worshipping and to be with Him for all eternity.

That is what we will be. Well, there are many things about that that you and I don't understand. A lot of people ask questions about eternity, what will it be like?

[ 44 : 29 ] What will we be doing there? I don't know. I don't really care all that much what we will be doing there. As long as I am there.

That is the thing that matters most. But I know that there most, if not all, of our time will be given to the worship of the Lamb. And the Lord God will be in the Lamb, will be in the temple in the midst of His people.

That's what the book of Revelation shows us. Will we know one another? I do. It would seem to suggest at times that we will.

And at other times that we won't. Because these are not things that really matter. Spurgeon put it like this. And he said, or he wrote more correctly, he said, there are three things that will surprise me about heaven when I get there.

Maybe you've heard this before. and he said, first of all, there's an awful lot of people not there that I expected to be there.

[ 45 : 43 ] And secondly, he said, there's an awful lot of people there and I didn't expect to be there.

But the greatest surprise of all to me, he said, was that I'm there myself. A sinner in the hands of an angry God, as Jonathan Edwards put it, saved by grace, loved from all eternity, and brought into this eternity through the work of the cross.

What did I do to deserve it? Nothing. Nothing. What can I do to thank the Lord for it?

Well, the psalmist said that in the psalm, the words that we were saying, what shall I render to the Lord for all his goodness to me? What does he say?

I'll take the cup of salvation. That is what you and I must do. And if you're struggling this evening with your faith, that is what you have to do as well.

[ 46 : 57 ] You have to come and take the cup of salvation. And to come to know this amazing love. There is no other thing for it except amazing love.

And to feel its presence during your day-to-day activities. Or there are times perhaps when it's not as evident as you would like it to be.

But there are other times when you feel so surrounded by this love that it is just wonderful and you don't want it to go away. Imagine that's what eternity will be like.

Let us pray. O Lord, we thank you for your word this evening. We thank you for the amazing love with which you love your people.

And we pray, O Lord, that any as yet who are not familiar who are not familiar with this love who are not familiar with this love. of this love this evening.

[ 48 : 00 ] Be with us now as we conclude our worship. We thank you for your love. And we thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ who prayed for us on the cross of Calvary for our sins.

Bless us and take us safely. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever. Amen.