



Love's Atoning Sacrifice

Devotion

This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:10 NIV).

Last month, the stores were filled with red and pink. Lace and hearts draped across aisles that boasted enough candy to satisfy a small army of children. Stuffed animals and roses invaded drugstores. Every other commercial convinced men that their sweetheart really wanted a diamond necklace this year for Valentine's Day or she might not be so willing to believe his next "I love you."

But now it's March, and where have all the valentines gone? The sugar rush has long since faded, and even some relationships of February may not have lasted longer than the beautiful bouquets.

For a holiday that boasts so much about love, it often falls short. Perhaps that is because the type of love we too often focus on is actually not love at all.

What, then, is love? In 1 John, *the disciple whom Jesus loved* (John 21:7 NIV) describes love to those he called his beloved. Read the opening verse of this devotion to see his definition. It has nothing to do with us, does it? It has everything to do with God.

He loved us. He sent His Son. This Son became an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

What does that mean? Well, some well-meaning greeting cards may proclaim, "I would die for you!" That may or may not be true, but the best any human could do for another would be to die earlier than planned for the sake of someone else's safety until the day they, too, will pass away. They may lose years on earth so that another may have more – and that is a wonderful love.

But God's love is even better. Jesus did not have to die. Ever. While even the greatest human hero will die someday, Jesus could have escaped death completely. But He chose to lay His life down so that we could be saved – not for a few days. Not for a few decades. The life Jesus won for us in His atoning sacrifice lasts forever and ever.

What a love! What a selfless, unconditional, everlasting love.

Now, dearly beloved, what do we do with such a love? Just a little earlier in 1 John 4, John tells us: ... *let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God* (verse 7).

We experience daily the most wonderful love this world has ever seen. Filled with such love, we can't help but want to share it! May God equip us with the strength and joy to share His love with others, that they may know the love of Jesus.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, You give us a love that the world does not understand. Your unconditional, sacrificial love is made clear in the atoning work Jesus completed for us on the cross. Through Your Spirit, enable us to proclaim Your love to others and to share this love in our words and actions. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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