

WALKING IN THE LIGHT- First John and the Path to Living Deeply in Christ - Part fifteen
 Sunday, April 25th, 2021 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2097
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THE ESSENTIAL MANIFESTATION OF A REDEEMED LIFE

1 John 3:16-24 - "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. [17] But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? [18] Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. [19] By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; [20] for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. [21] Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; [22] and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. [23] And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. [24] Whoever keeps his commandments abides in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us."

The advantage of teaching through a whole book of the Bible is not only that we get to see the broad range of subjects covered in the New Testament, but we also get a much better idea of how much space and time is given to a few subjects in particular. In other words, careful contextual study gives a better picture of the things *most important to God* - or, at the very least, *the things the Holy Spirit knows need the most emphasis in our lives*.

When John says we're to love our brother if we want to know God he knows he's putting tremendous pressure on us. He knows that, of course, we'll have no recourse but to **say** we love our brother - any brother. After all, we don't want to face the alternative and be forced to question whether or not we truly know God.

When push comes to shove we all **know** we're to love our brother. And we can say those words if we have to. That's why John feels compelled to say what he says in **verse 18** - "**Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.**"

John is much like the apostle Paul in his writing style. He has an ability to show tremendous, inspiring, doctrinal truth and then show where those doctrines take you in terms of consequence and practice.

This present section is exactly like that. This third chapter opens with that wonderful statement about the love of God - "**See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God!**" (3:1).

You can feel his excitement as he holds up this diamond of truth. How free! How merciful! How condescending and Self-denying God is in loving us, His sinful, totally undeserving children! He has powerfully **revealed** this amazing love in the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God the Son.

But there is more to be said. This love is not only something to be received and enjoyed. John says the love God has lavished **upon** us is to flow **through** us in the same way we've received it - **3:11** - **"For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another."**

John says, "Don't just sit and try to enjoy God's great love. It's not just a grace to be received. It's an example to be copied and a compassion to be extended. The same love that flows through the **vine** must flow through the **branch**. If I don't manifest the same love for those who have been not nearly as unjust to me as I have been to almighty God it just proves I haven't received God's love either:

1 John 3:14 - " We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death."

Today John is still unfolding the details of what it means to receive God's love. Just as Paul does in his letters, John unfolds doctrine at the beginning and then brings doctrine down to the details of life:

1) **THE LOVE I HAVE FOR YOU MUST BE THE SAME KIND OF LOVE JESUS HAD AND HAS FOR ME**

1 John 3:16 - "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers."

"By *this* we know love...." I don't know about love automatically. I don't understand love until I give a close look at Jesus. I **think** I know all about love. I love people who love me. I love people who agree with me. I love people who are related to me. I love people who help me get what I want. I love people who fulfill me and make me happy.

But none of this has anything whatsoever to do with the love of God. This is not the kind of love John is looking for in my life. He's looking for the love of Jesus in my heart, not the love of family or friends.

How did Jesus love me? He loved me when I hated Him. He loved me when He was all **right** and I was all **wrong**. He loved me when I wasn't interested in Him. Paul says He loved me when I was His enemy.

In Philippians chapter two Paul tells us more about the love of Jesus:

Philippians 2:4-8 - "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. [5] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but **made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant**, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, [8] he **humbled himself** by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Notice **verse 6** - "...who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God **a thing to be grasped....**"

Then, in words I usually read far too thoughtlessly, Paul adds something very important about the kind of love Jesus revealed - "...**he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross**"(2:8).

Jesus "**humbled Himself**" when He revealed His love for me. So I know one of the marks of showing the love of Jesus is it's always **humbling** to do so. And the **reason** it's humbling is the people I'm called to love with the love of Jesus are almost always **undeserving** of my love as I see it.

Paul wants me to think his words through. Of course I'm to humble myself and extend my grace and love for people who have wronged and mistreated me. Of course they don't deserve it. That's the way it was for Jesus and that's the way it is for me. Showing Jesus' love **always** requires humility.

Jesus was totally equal with God. He had no obligations to you and me. He had no debt to you or me that He had to pay. **We** were in the wrong. We had the debt. We were the ones guilty of **unjust treatment** of the One who created us and owned us. Jesus died because He gave up His

rights, position, and glory, and gave His very life for those who treated God with insult and injustice.

That's what John wants me to see in the love of Jesus. He laid everything aside when He didn't have to. **"He laid down his life" (3:16).**

Why is there a church at all on planet earth? Why are there any redeemed ones at all? There's only one reason. Jesus initiated amends with those who treated Him unjustly. When Jesus saw the giant rift - the gap between God and man - He blinked first. He gave in first. He had no reason to do this at all in terms of what was *proper* or what was *just*.

Let's all be real clear on this point. If Jesus responded to us with justice - if He did what was proper - if His main concern was seeing that people didn't get away with unjust actions - we'd all be doomed. John knows that, and we all know it too. Usually.

Jesus just loved and gave and forgave and gave up His life for those who treated Him miserably and unjustly. That's why there is such a thing as Christianity. Now, John says, that is how we know what love really looks like - how it really works.

2) **LOOK FOR PRACTICAL WAYS TO DEMONSTRATE THE LOVE OF GOD IN YOUR HEART**

1 John 3:17-18 - **"But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? [18] Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."**

Note those words, **"....how does God's love abide in him?"** How indeed? John's point is crystal clear. If the love of God in my life isn't *visible* - isn't *demonstrated* - especially to those who treat me unjustly, then it's not really there at all. My Christian life is all smoke. I'm playing games. I'm kidding myself.

Notice how John continues to zero in on the details of this truth. **Verse 16** closed with the words, **"....we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers."** And so we should. And once in a while we even feel like maybe we *could* - if it were someone really important and close to us.

But that's not likely to happen to very many of us. We just aren't confronted with situations like that very often. So **verse 17** takes me from the world of unlikely crisis to the world of normal daily living. I will encounter people with needs of some kind every day of my life. And the greatest need they will have, at some point or another, will be my gracious love for them in spite of their unjust treatment of me. And whether or not Jesus has really come into my life isn't manifested by repeating certain words about Him or citing certain Scriptures about Him, or any other such thing.

Remember, the love of Jesus is always humbling. It always sucks the life out of my **pride** and my **rights**. If Jesus has come into my heart I will give **up** my rights and give **out** my love to those who treat me unjustly just as Jesus gave up His life for me when **I** treated **Him** unjustly. Those are the **rules**. We play it that way or we don't get to play at all.

Verse 18 emphasizes the same point - "**Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.**" This won't be just talk. It won't be just doctrine. It won't just be something you say "**Amen**" to in church. You will bump into someone you don't want to talk to in the parking lot after church and the two of you will embrace. And you will sparkle and shine anew with the grace and love of Jesus.

This is the **only** time, says John, your religion gets real. You'll bump into someone whom you feel has wronged you and both of you are turning sour inside over a past incident. And that person will need your grace and smile and forgiveness no **more** than **you** still need **God's** grace and smile and forgiveness. And even though it wasn't your fault, and even though he or she doesn't deserve it, you'll remember that you deserve Jesus' love even less. And you'll begin to preach to your own heart and say, "**How could I be so proud and arrogant not to lay down my rights - my life - for this person?**"

Hear John's plea this morning! If you and I aren't very careful our faith becomes nothing more than a collection of church memories and moral insights. We can all **agree** with more truth than we ever actually **possess**. You can't take in spiritual food just from reading the Bible or listening to sermons. You can hear it all and read it all and still be spiritually anorexic. Make sure you **ingest** the life of Jesus. Make sure all of this isn't just talk. Make sure it **works** this way in your own heart. Make this flow in your corner of the body of Christ.

3) **KNOW HOW MUCH THIS MATTERS. EVERYTHING ELSE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS TIED TO THIS MANIFESTATION OF THE LOVE OF JESUS IN MY HEART**

1 John 3:19-22 - “By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; [20] for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. [21] Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; [22] and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.”

Some commandments have to be obeyed if I'm to be saved at all. Not that we're saved **by** works, but there are certain **tell-tale manifestations** of what the life of Jesus looks like when it's present and alive in my heart. Who would have thought that my love for those who treat me unjustly had anything to do with what happens in my heart when I come into the presence of my God? Who would have thought that failure in the one fouls up the other?

Just as John did in last week's text, he unfolds other issues related to my love for my brother or sister:

a) **1 John 3:19-20 - “By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; [20] for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.”**

This is the second time John has stressed this. The first time was in **3:14**. Now he repeats it. The obvious issue here is **assurance**. John is a realist. You come to times when you begin to wonder just how real this whole thing is in your own life. How do I know where I stand with God? What if I've been mistaken all my life? Maybe I'm not as spiritual as I think.

John says there is nothing that will assure your heart before the Lord more than looking over your life and seeing where the reality of the cross manifested itself in the same kind of love - beyond what the world would ever see as justified or necessary - where that kind of love was clearly evidenced in your own attitude toward those the Spirit of the Lord talked to you about.

John says that's the way you know you are of the truth. That's the proof of the genuine article. And if all this sounds a little stretched to you, remember that John is only restating what Jesus said earlier:

Matthew 5:44-45 - "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, [45] so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."

Jesus means for us to mark the deep message of those verses. God showers His goodness to those who are "**unjust.**" That means He's benevolent to those who are unjust **to Him**. That's what God is **like**. And that means a wrong relationship with a person who is "**unjust**" in his treatment of **me** makes me **un-godly**. That is, **un-like** God Himself as He has revealed Himself so graciously to me in Jesus Christ.

- b) **1 John 3:21-22 - "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; [22] and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him."**

Confidence and power in prayer are the issues John links with loving those who treat us unjustly in these two verses. Nothing shuts down the walk with God as quickly as a guilty heart in the throne room. John says that love for all the brothers opens up communication with God. Disobedience at this point turns your own heart into an enemy.

We hear a lot about power in prayer. We hear about seeing God move when we pray - getting beyond just "saying prayers" and seeing God work in power. And there's an abundance of teaching available on all of that. But I haven't heard very many people say that answers to prayer are directly tied to my love for the brother who treats me justly. There will be no answers to prayer for the bitter or hateful heart. That's exactly what John is teaching in these verses.

This is very practical truth. Where do you start in seeking revival from the Lord? Do you first call people to the front to wait on God ? Or do you first send them out to be reconciled to their brothers and sisters in the congregation?

Matthew 5:23-24 - “So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, [24] **leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.**”

That's Jesus' teaching on first things first. Things must be done in the right order.

4) **BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST AND A LIFE OF SELF-SACRIFICING LOVE ARE INSEPARABLE - YOU CAN'T HAVE ONE WITHOUT THE OTHER**

1 John 3:23-24 - “And this is his commandment, that we **believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.** [24] Whoever keeps his commandments abides in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.”

How many commands do you have to keep to be a good Christian? How many different things do you have to focus in on? Is it really like a juggling act at the circus? Do I have to try to keep growing in thousands of different areas at once?

Well, no doubt the Holy Spirit will help me turn my mind toward the things I'm neglecting. And those will be various. But John says there are two important commands that must be preserved in their authority over all of my life - ***two big decisions that guide all the other little ones:***

A) FIRST, I MUST BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST – 1 JOHN 3:23A

“And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ....”

That verb ***“believe”*** points to a once-for-all decision that I've made. I've settled the matter that in terms of the moral decisions of my life Jesus Christ makes all the morally non-neutral decisions about what I will and will not do, how I will and will not react, what I will and will not say.

I've decided that Jesus Christ, on all the best evidence, is the eternal Son of God. He's the only source of redemption and peace with God. And He cannot be received as Savior unless, in the very same act of faith, He's received as Lord over all the kingdoms of my heart.

B) SECOND, HIS LOVE, WHICH WAS PLANTED IN MY HEART AT SALVATION, MUST FLOW UNCONDITIONALLY TO ALL WHO TREAT ME IN AN UNJUST FASHION - 1 JOHN 3:23B

“...and love one another, just as he has commanded us.”

Please note, I am just as commanded to ***love the one who treats me unjustly*** as I am commanded to ***believe in Jesus Christ***. That's how big the issue of love for the unjust is. The verb to "love" is in the continuous present tense. In other words, the love is the ongoing witness or proof that ***I do believe in Jesus in a life changing way***. That's why these two commands stand or fall together all through the book of 1 John.

The first thing saving belief does is produce forgiving love in the heart of the one who's received it. This keeps everything else going in the Christian life and in the body of Christ. It gives something for the world to see and believe about the incredible wonder of the power of a forgiving Jesus in our midst.

Remember, Jesus never left us with the task of just ***telling*** the world about His love. Of course, we ***do*** need words. But He also wants them to have ***proof*** that He's still alive and still gracious to unjust people.

By the way, this is why He has left us all together - bumping into all sorts of annoying people in the church instead of immediately taking all the saved to heaven. He wants the world to ***see*** what His amazing, incredible grace ***looks*** like through His body - you and me. They only see the love of Jesus when you extend it to someone who has abused you beyond belief. That's the only time Jesus gets visible.

It is totally unfair to just ask the world to ***take your word*** for the incredible love of Jesus. ***Show it to them.***