

WALKING IN THE LIGHT- First John and the Path to Living Deeply in Christ - Part seventeen
Sunday, May 16th, 2021 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2101
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GOD'S LOVE PERFECTED IN OUR OWN HEARTS

1 John 4:7-12 - "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. [8] Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. [9] In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. [10] 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. [11] Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. [12] No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us."

John made a very important statement back in **1 John 3:23** - **"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."**

This is what the Christian life looks like when it's boiled down to its very essence. We are to **"believe in the name of God's Son, Jesus Christ"** and we are to **"love one another."** Those are the two keys. John has been expanding on these two ideas ever since.

Chapter 4:1-6 unpacks what **believing in Jesus Christ** is all about. John has been refining the meaning of the truth that Jesus Christ has **"come in the flesh."** Jesus is absolutely essential and unique and His saving work is God's final word.

Chapter 4:7-12 unfolds the other half of the command spelled out in **3:23**. John still has more to say on the subject of **loving one another**. **Verses 7 and 11** both contain the exhortation to love - **"Beloved, let us love one another...."(7)**, and **"....we also ought to love one another"(11)**.

Arranged in our text today are **three reasons** backing up these commands to love one another:

1) **FIRST, WE SHOULD LOVE ONE ANOTHER BECAUSE LOVE COMES FROM GOD AND GOD IS LOVE**

1 John 4:7-8 - “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. [8] Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”

The God who saved me - the God to whom I've come - the God who has come to dwell by His Spirit in my heart - what is this God like? That's a very crucial question. It's a crucial question because I'm supposed to be like Him. I'm to be shaped more and more into His likeness. What *is* that likeness? What does the likeness of God look like?

That's what John is dealing with in these two verses. That's why he emphasizes that basic truth about being **“born of God” (7)**. John's reminding me of my own basic theology - that in becoming a Christian I'm claiming that something of God's genetics - His life - His nature - is actually planted in my own soul.

And that life of God is love. I can't be **changed** by God without first being **reached** by His love. And I can't become more like **God** without becoming more **loving**. That's the **kind** of change God makes. **Forgiving my sins** is the change God's love makes in my **record**. **Loving my enemies** is the change God's love makes in **me**.

It can be no other way, because God is love. If God is love, and God is in my life, then God's love is in my life. In the same way a **breathalyzer test** checks for the presence of alcohol in the blood John says **“love one for another”** is the test of the presence of God in my heart. You can tell **if** a person has been drinking and

how much he's been drinking by what's **in** his system. They can take samples from athletes and tell if they've been taking drugs. If the drug is **in** there, then it's **in** there. It will show up.

But how do you tell if someone has **God** in his or her heart? Most people, especially **church going** people, **say** God is in their hearts. But how do we know for sure? John says, **test for love samples**. If God is present, so is His love. If it's **in** there, it's **in** there. It's that simple and that obvious.

2) WHILE THE SOURCE OF LOVE IS GOD'S NATURE, THE DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S LOVE IS JESUS CHRIST

1 John 4:9-11 - "In this the love of God was **made manifest among us**, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. [10] 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**. [11] Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

Notice that phrase, "**the love of God was made manifest among us**"(4:9). This isn't when God's love **came into existence**. After all, God **is**, and has **always been** love. But this is when we **learned the exact nature of God's love**. His love was "**made manifest**" when God sent His Son into the world to die for you and me.

I'm notorious for linking **love** with **sentiment**. We talk about people "**falling in love**." We see little slogans. Or we pick certain people we feel pretty good about and pride ourselves in our love for them.

Into all of this fuzziness John talks about what **true** love looks like - what **God's** love looks like when it's in my heart. And he starts by talking about the **blood of**

Jesus being spilled out at the end of sharp nails and spears. That's what that big word "**propitiation**" is all about in **verse 10**.

But notice John's point here. Not only is the cross the place where we **experience** God's forgiving love, it's where we find the **pattern** for and the **meaning** of loving others.

Now, this isn't easy for any of us. Offering free, sacrificial, forgiving love to people who have wronged us poses certain theological questions:

If we forgive too freely, or too quickly, people won't take holiness seriously. If grace and mercy come easily where's the incentive not to sin again? People won't care about sin if forgiveness is cheap. How will they ever **learn their lesson** so they don't hurt **other** people the way they have hurt **us**?

That's an issue that needs to be thought through in the teaching of every church. I wrestle with that in my own ministry all the time. Every thoughtful pastor should. You can preach in such a way that one group of people will say you are too harsh, too legalistic, with too much emphasis on disciplined holiness. People will feel devastated in their failures. They'll think they can never measure up. They'll feel they never can do anything right in God's eyes.

Or you can preach wonderful, free, unconditional grace in such a marvelous way that others will say, "Hey, you're taking away any consequence of sin. People will grow indifferent about holiness and doing what's right. They'll think that God loves them the way they are and they can **stay** the way they are all the way to heaven!"

Those aren't light, breezy issues. We need to talk about them. It seems to me that in this whole issue what really needs to be re-emphasized is the **effect** grace has

on the heart **receiving** it. What did receiving God's grace **do** to you? Did it make you love **God** more or did it make you love **sin** more? Did it make you happy when you sinned or make you sad when you sinned? Did it draw you closer to God or closer to the world?

This is a very important issue. Some issues are **root** issues. The answer you give to them shapes the way to think about many **other** issues as well. **What was it that changed your heart toward God?** Why do you love Him when so many others don't? Did **you make yourself** love God all on your own or did **God** do something in your heart - either instantly or gradually - that led and caused you to love Him?

Actually, John will give the Scriptural answer to that question twice in this fourth chapter - **1 John 4:10, 19** - **"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....[19] We love because he first loved us."**

So there it is. God's love is the cause, the fountain, the transforming source of my changed heart and my changed affections. He turned me from being an enemy into being a friend.

But how did He change me? He changed me by loving me in spite of my pathetic, wretched guilt. He changed me by dying for me. He changed me by sacrificial grace. And John isn't the only one to tell me this. Paul agrees:

Ephesians 2:1-5 - **"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins [2] in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— [3] among whom we all once lived in the passions of our**

flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. [4] *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, [5] even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved....*”

Apparently we need to keep the **sequence** of this wonderful salvation alive in our thoughts. It's **not** enough to know Jesus loved us and died for us. That in itself isn't the furnace where God-like love is forged.

The real issue is the **timing** of the manifestation of this love. **When** did Jesus come and die for us? Paul says He came when we were "**by nature children of wrath**"(2:3). **When** did Jesus give up all of His rights for us? Was it when we were seeking the Spirit of God? No, says Paul. It was when we were "**following the prince of the power of the air**"(2:2).

Why is it so important to remember this? Because if I forget this I'm liable to offer forgiveness to others **when I think they have somehow paid for their sins against me**. And that's exactly the **opposite** of the way God showed His love to me.

So I mustn't fall into the pattern of **requiring amends** or **some form of restitution** before I offer my enemy forgiving, gracious, sacrificial love. If I make people **pay** for their wrongs **before** I offer them my love and grace, I've forgotten the pattern of the cross. I've forgotten my roots. I've betrayed my salvation. I've denied Christ.

That's why John talks so much about the pattern of love being fleshed out in what Jesus Christ did for me. What gradually turned my heart to love God and His holiness **was** and still **is** God's amazing grace. God gave His life for me when I

was His enemy. And what will change the heart of **my** enemy is **my** offer of free grace **while** he is still my enemy. That's what Christian love is in its **roots** in God and that is what it must be in its **fruit** in me.

I believe this to be so important. You change people as you love them. Revenge **hardens** and **sours** both those who **give** it and those who **receive** it. You weren't changed by God making you sweat it out for a few hundred years in hell. You were transformed by God's loving reach and embrace in Jesus Christ. That's God's system.

3) **GOD'S LOVE IS COMPLETED IN GOD'S CHILDREN**

1 John 4:12 - "No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and **his love is perfected in us.**"

Here's John's progression of thought. God's love has its **source** in His nature. Then, God's love is **manifested** savingly in His Son. Finally, God's love is **perfected** and **completed** through His loving, forgiving children. And I'm meant to see that none of the links in this chain can be ignored without the whole structure crashing to the ground. It's not just about what **God** is like. And it's not just about what **Jesus** did. It's also about how **I** love **my** enemy **while** he is still my enemy.

Verse 12 is interesting. It seems like a funny place for John to launch into the subject of the **invisibility** of God. Why should John bother to remind us we worship a God we can't see. One would think we all know this. It's so obvious. Some people might even find it discouraging. What's John getting at?

Here's his point. If God is **invisible** how can you tell when He's **present**. The church **declares** God's reality and presence. In fact, it calls people to **place faith**

in a God they have never seen. How can those whom we address in the world take us seriously when we describe God's love and presence? How can they know when God is truly at work? What gives them the kind of **evidence** they can lean on to activate their faith and trust?

John says there is only one way. Jesus isn't physically here anymore. No one can **see** Him. Now that Jesus has come and gone there is only one way for God to be real to onlookers - one way that God becomes visible and an object of their faith. And John is pleading with the church not to let their own egos or their own smallness of heart block God out from people's sight.

In his masterful book, ***"Like Father, Like Son - The Trinity Imaged In Our Humanity,"*** **Thomas Smail** says this: ***"The new humanity in Christ that the Church offers in its missions is plausible outside the Church only if it can be seen to be effective inside the Church....A church riven by bad relationships and yet preaching reconciliation is like a Total Abstinence society all of whose members are permanently drunk!"***

God becomes visible when I love my enemies the way God loved me - **sacrificially** and **preemptively**. What was God's ultimate **intention** in extending His love to you? Why did He do it? Was it just to save **you** or to **reach others through you**?

Of course, we'd all **say** His plan was to reach others through us. We're not stupid. But if I **say** that, I must **live** it. And that means I must offer love just as sacrificially and just as passionately to **my** enemies **while** they are still my enemies as God offered **His** love and grace to His enemies **while** they were still **His** enemies.

"Well, sin can't just be ignored, Pastor Don." And you're right. It can't. But we need

to keep thinking this issue through. Where was my sin paid for? Did I pay for it myself, or did Jesus pay for it? "Jesus paid for it." But Jesus didn't just pay for **my** sin. He paid for my **enemy's** sin too. Jesus totally paid the debt of my enemy's sin, to the extent that there is nothing else **I** need to extract from my enemy before I can love and be gracious to him or her.

I understand there are **consequences** to people's actions in this world. I understand that, even in the church, certain sins require action on the part of the church. This church has done that in the past - too much for some people's liking and not enough for others. But that's not our subject in this teaching. I'm talking about **my own heart** and how **I react** toward those whom I dislike because they have genuinely wronged me - perhaps very deeply.

I can easily imagine Peter making his theological case as he responds to Jesus' command to forgive the brother who sinned against him, not seven times, but four hundred and ninety times. "**How can I forgive my brother who sins against me 7x70? If he comes back and does the same thing to me 490 times, what kind of repentance is that?**"

It **seems** like a really astute theological question - the kind I would like to have asked. It's humbling to think of what Jesus probably would have said: "**Why don't you let me worry about your enemy's repentance. You worry about your forgiveness.**"

That's it exactly. "Stay free, Peter. Stay free. **Vengeance** is God's. Only God is righteous enough to be entrusted with dispensing justice and vengeance. **Forgiveness** - that's your job."

And everyone said....