
The Epistles of John

“Love Makes the Church Go Round”

1 John 4:7-21

Back when I originally wrote this I was reading an editorial from one of the religious services. It was talking about the reemergence of Jerry Falwell, and possibly the moral majority as well. The basic assumption was, since Clinton had been elected the religious right would become more active. The author saw this as very dangerous.

Larry King, in a very factious manner, speculated that Bill Clinton had hired people like Phyllis Schlafly and other members of the right and religious right to speak out. Clinton did this because he knew their “hatred and intolerance” was so far out of touch with reality they’d help get him elected.

The problem then, and now, is the failure to realize biblical Christian values are still more in line with middle America than the laze fare attitude expressed by much of the world, the anything goes approach to life.

Nevertheless, there is a problem. Aside from the fact those holding sound moral values are rarely pictured accurately by the media, these people sometimes feed the attack themselves. Too many times those representing themselves as part of the religious community don’t manifest the love of God for the sinner. Their style comes across as aggressive and hostile.

We’ll do much for the spread of the Gospel if people see our love more frequently than our righteous indignation. This is why we need to put more energy into loving people than doing our own brand of social engineering. A good example of this, from what little I know, is Habitat For Humanity. This Christian based group builds or restores homes for those who are in need of shelter. They don’t trade the home for the Gospel, but they live their faith in front of those they serve and they always give a Bible to the new home owner. It will be very interesting to see how much influence this has for the Lord when we get to eternity.

Someone once sang, “Love Makes The World Go Round.” Well, that doesn’t really seem to be the case. But, love does make the church go round, or should anyway.

I Introduction

II We Love Because ...

Verses 7-12

III God is Love ...

Verses 13-18

IV And We Are Directed to be Loving

Verses 19-21

V Conclusion

I Introduction: I get the feeling I’ve been teaching the same message for a number of weeks now. But, I guess if your going to teach on the letters of the “Apostle of Love” and talk about encouragement, then we’re going to talk a lot about the importance of love within the church. And, until we get it right, this is probably for the best.

When doctrinal battles arise in the church it is easy for love to fly out the door. If one side of the discussion is being presented by those who are in rebellion against God, and therefore unloving by definition, it can be easy for us to fall into the trap of responding with hostility.

When someone in the body gets suckered into toying with false teachings, it is easy to be more frustrated than loving. But it is only when we give truth, correct doctrine, in the context of love, that we see real growth.

God saved us in love. He desires our growth. We help one another grow through love. And John's focus in the passage 1 John 4:7-21 is, it is love that is the hallmark of the Christian life. His readers could examine the lives of the false prophets. In so doing they would realize what was missing. It was God's love in the lives of these individuals.

II We Love Because ...: The test of Christian living is the demonstration of God's love. All we do or say should be a testimony to God's love in our lives. Biblical love comes from God. Only God can consistently love us in an unselfish way. God's love is the model for ours.

“... and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:2).

Referring to the knowledge of God John is not talking about saving knowledge. He is talking about the knowledge which comes in relationship. As we abide in Christ, growing in our knowledge of Him, His love will be manifest in our lives.

Remember, the false teachers had said knowledge of God was found in esoteric principles, having no correlation to how the recipient of the information lived. John said if we know God we are His children, and the proof of this is God's love in us.

Verse 8: In contrast with the love demonstrated by God's children, there is no godly love in found in the lives of the unbelievers. “Consider,” John might say to his readers, “the unloving lives of these teachers influencing you.”

This may sound harsh, but the key thought here relates to “godly love.” We all know people who appear loving and by human standards are, but only God truly knows their hearts. And John says outside of God, true love is impossible. We must never forget the lost are lost no matter how they look on the outside.

Verses 9-10: John makes it clear when he speaks of godly love, he is identifying the love of God lived out on the cross. Christ Himself expressed this when He said,

“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

God's love for us defines what love is. And that love was the sacrificial love of Christ on the cross. He loved us so much He was willing to die for us so that we would have the opportunity to receive eternal life.

Our own love isn't biblical love. Biblical love is God's love moving through us to one another. Isn't that great? This means we don't have to experience the warm fuzzes for one another to love one another. I keep repeating this because our culture constantly confuses emotional love, lust, whatever, etc. with mature love. Mature love, or from our perspective, biblical love, is worked out in action, not emotions.

Verse 11: When we struggle with loving one another we need to step back and reexamine ourselves, desiring an accurate self-image. As we see how much God loved us while we were in our sins, we can then be motivated to love others. We are certainly no better than they.

“But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

God's love and sacrifice for us, is to be our motivation to in turn love others sacrificially.

Verse 12: And it is as we love in this manner the world can see God's love. Christ has placed us here as His body. It is when we love people that they have an opportunity to see God. We must never forget that in all we do as the church we are representing God's love to a fallen world. We must consider all our actions in light of the question, does this decision show God's love to the world around us?

III God is Love ...: It is the presence of the Holy Spirit that is the final validation of Salvation. Without the Holy Spirit no unregenerate can be saved. And when saved the new believer is simultaneously indwelt by the Spirit.

“You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ” (Romans 8:9).

The presence of the Spirit results in the believer glorifying God. What some theologians seem to forget is, it is the Spirit's function to glorify Christ not Himself. This is why it is inappropriate to allow a focus on the Holy Spirit to obscure the glory of Christ.

“When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me” (John 15:26).

It is important to note that John is saying believers will not only testify for Christ, but they will be accurate, under leading of the Holy Spirit, in their testimony. The problem with the false teachers was, though they talked about Jesus Christ, he was a different Christ. The proof of salvation is an orthodox testimony of the incarnation. Only those who are of Christ will testify accurately to Who He is.

Confidence of salvation is dependent on Who God is, not our deserving it. God, in His loving mercy, took on human form and died for sin. We are saved because He loves us, not because we deserve it. And it is the presence of the Holy Spirit that makes God's love real in us.

“And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Romans 5:5).

Verse 16b-18: The public testimony of salvation, is not the claiming of some kind of esoteric knowledge. It is not some mystic statement about the Christ consciousness. The sign of salvation is the presence of God's love in the life of the believer. We are saved because God loves us and His love flowing through us validates our salvation. Biblical love can only exist and be perfected in relationship with God. It cannot be counterfeited. The false prophets apparently showed a significant lack of love.

How does fear in the life of the believer reflect an inadequate understanding of God's love? God's love in us is also the basis of our confidence as we stand before Him. We may lose our works, those done for ourselves, but we will always be able to stand before God, anticipating an eternity with Him in full confidence that He loves us.

We have nothing to fear. John is specifically talking about fear of judgment because God's love paid the price for our sin. This not only means we don't have to fear eternal judgment, but we don't have to fear that when we do sin God is out to get us. And I know believers sometimes feel this way. But we have a loving Father who desires restoration, not punishment. Even when He does discipline, it is because He loves us and so we don't have to fear His discipline.

But in the broader scheme of life we have nothing to fear from circumstances either. We have a loving Father who cares for us.

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4: 6-7).

It makes sense when you think about it. If God loves us enough to die for us, then we have nothing to fear, either in judgment or in life. This isn't because our lives will be perfect, but because God watches over us, and allows all that occurs in our lives to perfect our relationship with and dependency on Him.

IV And We Are to be Loving: John summarizes all this with the truth that we love in response to the love of God in us. We are incapable of loving as God loves except as a response to His love though the power of the Holy Spirit.

The test for the teachers was the presence of God's love in their lives. They claimed to be of God, but without His love clearly they were liars. They were not of Christ. Love of God means keeping His commands. They didn't love. They didn't keep His commands. They weren't His.

By extension the readers of John's letters must have been showing God's love, because they were His.

“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him” (John 14:21).

Conclusion: Understanding God's love of us, as the model of love, what are some practical ways we can demonstrate this love towards others? First we need to start by understanding just how important it is that we express this love. Stott put it this way:

*“ God's love which originates in Himself and was manifested in His Son is perfected in His people. It is 'brought to perfection within us' (NEB). God's love for us is perfected only when it is reproduced in us or (as it may mean) 'among us' in the Christian fellowship.”*¹

As believers we are to be the manifestation of God's love before a fallen world. *What are some of the ways you have or can live out this love?*

There are many practical ways we can show God's love. Husbands can love wives. Parents can love children, and visa versa. This means we have to put aside selfishness, me first living. Instead in consideration of all the Lord has done for us, we need to consider how we can care for others. *Agapé* means being willing to be inconvenienced for the needs of others, within our family, within our church. Actually the word inconvenience is not adequate. A better word is sacrifice. God treated us sacrificially, we need to treat ours accordingly.

How can we experience the reality of God's love within this body? Within the local community of believers we must strive to always balance all we do with truth and love.

“ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Ephesians 4:15-16).

Next, let us be concerned with our responsibility as a body to the world. The church is to be the presence of Christ in the midst of a hostile and unloving world. And how the church loves its enemies will be a testimony to the reality of God's love in providing the way of salvation.

“ But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (Luke 6:28).

Let me close with a reminder of comments I've been making a lot lately. All we do, in our relationships with each other, in our families, and in the family of this body, must be carried out with concern for the demonstration of God's love in us.

And, all we do as a body within the confines of the church and in the community at large must also be done with the ultimate desire of making God's love real to those around us. God sent Christ to demonstrate His love. Now He sends us out to continue the process of demonstrating His love. Let us pray that we never lose sight of the responsibility to love those who Christ died to save.

¹ Stott, John R. W., The Epistles of John, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1983, p. 164.

*We are One in The Spirit,
We are One in The Lord.
We are One in The Spirit,
We are One in The Lord.
And we pray that all unity
may one day be restored.*

*We will work with each other,
We will work side by side.
We will work with each other,
We will work side by side.
And we'll guard each man's dignity
And save each man's pride.*

*We will work with each other,
We will work side by side.
We will work with each other,
We will work side by side.
And we'll guard each man's dignity
And save each man's pride.*

*We will walk with each other,
We will walk hand in hand.
We will walk with each other,
We will walk hand in hand.
And together we'll spread the News
that God is in our land.*

Chorus

*And they'll know we are Christians by our love,
By our Love,
Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love. ²*

² Scholte, Peter, "We are One in The Spirit," copyright 1966 F.E.L. (licensed)

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I Introduction:

II We Love Because ...: *(Ephesians 5:2).*

Verse 8:

Verses 9-10: *(John 15:13)*

Verse 11: *(Romans 5:8).*

Verse 12:

III God is Love ...:

(Romans 8:9; John 15:26; Romans 5:5)

Verse 16b-18:

(Philippians 4: 6-7)

IV And We Are to be Loving:

(John 14:21)

Conclusion:

(Ephesians 4:15-16; Luke 6:28)

Personal Application: Make a list of the different ways you can demonstrate God's love to those around you, both within and without the body. Ask God to help you see how He would help you love others.

Prayer for the Week: Lord, may I be a testimony to Your love. In Christ's name, amen.