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A0446 -- Nov. 14, 2004 – 1 John 4:11-14 – God Among Us

Last week, we looked at 1 John 4:7-10. The subject of John's discourse here is "love." In v. 7, John beseeches us to love one another, and that the source of all love is God. Therefore, **everyone who loves is born of God and knows God**. So, two things can be said of the one who loves. First, he is **born of God**. This means that he is a genuine Christian. One must first be a genuine Christian before he can truly "love." The second thing that can be said of the one who loves is that he **knows God**. This means more than simply being a Christian. John thinks of knowing God as having advanced knowledge of God (cf. 2:3, 13, 14). So, the two preconditions for loving one another are to first, be a Christian and second, to have advanced knowledge of God.

In v. 8, we find these two pre-conditions confirmed because John says that the **one who does not love does not know God**. One may be a genuine Christian but not love. It is not true that a genuine Christians cannot hate another Christian. Failure to love happens because some genuine Christians never advance in their knowledge of God. They never really come to know who God is. John says here that they fail to really understand what it means to say that **God is love**. They never really perceived the love of God.

In v. 9, John wants to demonstrate or prove that **God is love**. Someone might say, "Oh, I can love without knowing that God is love." John would say, "Oh really, how can you know that you are loving someone if you don't know what love is? **All love is from God**. Therefore, if you are not **born of God** and you don't have advanced knowledge and understanding of God, then how can you know if you genuinely love someone?" Then John begins to prove that **God is love**. The way God demonstrated His love was by sending **His one of a kind Son into the world**. Why did God send **His one of a kind Son into the world? So that we might live through Him**. This refers to spiritual life. All men are born spiritually dead, but God sent His one of a kind Son into the world so that we might receive spiritual life through believing in Jesus Christ.

Verse 10 gives another way in which God demonstrated His love. It was by sending **His Son to be the propitiation for our sins**. He not only sent His Son into the sin-filled world, He sent His Son to take care of the barrier between God and the world, the barrier of sin. He did this by going to the cross. This illustrates the Life/Death Principal. The Life/Death Principal states that for you to live something or someone must die. This is true in the physical world and in the spiritual world. For you to go on living physically, you have to eat. If you eat meat, then some animal has to die for you to keep on living. Some people in Paul's day rejected the eating of meat because of the spiritual implications of this concept (1 Tim. 4:3). They didn't like the idea that for their life to be sustained, another life had to die. This physical example has a spiritual corollary. If you are here today and you are not a Christian, then you are spiritually dead. Your spiritual death might be likened to a physical corpse. How much communication can you have with a corpse? In the same way, your human spirit is dead to the things of God. You are separate from God. For your spirit to come alive, something must die. The one person who died for you both spiritually and physically is Jesus Christ. His perfect human body and perfect human spirit underwent death so that your human body and your human spirit could be made alive. All you have to do is believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

In addition to the Life/Death Principal, two aspects of genuine Christian love are revealed in v. 10. The first is that Christian love is initiatory, not responsive. This is revealed in the words, **not that we loved God, but that He loved us**. God took the first step toward man and we ought to love other Christians whether they are lovely or lovable. Focus on initiating love and not waiting for someone to love you first. God already loved us first, all of us, so we shouldn't withhold love from any Christian brother or sister.

The second principle of genuine Christian love is that it can express itself in the spiritual realm. We ought to provide for our Christian brothers and sisters spiritually. This principle is elaborated on in 1 John 5:16. There the principal is given that if you see a brother sinning a sin that does not lead to immediate death, then you should pray to God for your brother and God will extend the physical life of your brother. So, genuine Christian love is initiatory and in the spiritual realm. Today we center in on the heart of John's letter and we meet the most important verse in 1 John 4:14. Let's begin by reading v. 11-14.

Greek Text 4:11 'Agapetoi', ei outos o theos egapesen hemas, kai hemeis ophelomen allelous agapan.

Translation 4:11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

What is the proper Christian response to God's love for us? That we love one another following His supreme example as the model for *how* we should love one another. How did God love us? John says, **beloved** (a vocative), **if God so loved us**, that is if God loved us in the way just described in vv. 9-10. How was God's love described in vv. 9-10? (1) By sending His one of a kind Son into the world, and (2) this one of a kind Son died for us to propitiate the Father's wrath. Why did God do this? Verse 9 answers, **so that we might live through Him**. This is talking about spiritual life. He died so that we might have spiritual life. This is love, **not that we loved God but that He loved us**. This was the first principle of Christian love. It is initiatory, not responsive. Christian love takes the first step. Christian love is not characterized by responding to others who love you, anyone can responsively love. But Christian love is marked by its initiatory nature. Christian love is marked by loving others whether they love you or not. This is demonstrated by God in that **we did not love God, but He loved us** and the way He expressed this was by **sending His one of a kind Son to be the propitiation for our sins**. Therefore, **we also ought to love one another**.

What are the two areas we can love other Christians in our local churches? Remember, this letter was written to a local church. So, what are the two ways we can love each other here at Fredericksburg Bible Church?

- (1) *Physically*: If we have the world's goods/possessions and we see a brother in need of the world's goods/possessions, we can help sustain their physical life (1 John 3:17).
- (2) *Spiritually*: If we see a brother sin a sin not unto death, we can pray for them so that God will extend their physical life (1 John 5:16-17). Sin is the cause of all death and the Scriptural principle is that righteousness leads to sustained physical life and sin leads to physical death (Prov. 10:2, 11:4, 12:28, 11:19).

The lesson here is that if God loved us so much that He initiated a relationship with us by sending His Son and if the Son was obedient to death, even death on a cross for us, then we ought to actively love one another *physically* and *spiritually*. If God so loved the world that he sent His only Son, how can we excuse not loving a fellow brother for whom God sent His only Son? Zane Hodges says of this verse, "As those who are so deeply **Beloved** of God, our profound obligation and privilege is to love our brother who is equally **Beloved** by Him."ⁱ When we respond to God's love by loving others God is manifested. However, John says...

Greek Text 4:12 theon oudeis popote tetheatai. ean agapomen allelous, o theos en hemin menei kai he agape autou en humin teteleiomene estin.

Translation 4:12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.

How are we to explain the first phrase of v. 12? **No one has seen God at any time...yet God abides in us.** God is invisible, **no one has seen God at any time**, and it is this invisible God that **abides in us** and manifests Himself in us when we love one another! How can God be invisible and visible at the same time? I imagine many Christians have wondered about this question. We know that Scripture says that no one has seen God but we also know that God appeared. One obvious example is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Did not Jesus Christ claim to be God? If He was God, then some people must have seen God. Therefore, how can God be both invisible and visible? Let's look at some of God's appearances in Scripture.

- Did not Adam and Eve walk with the pre-Incarnate Christ in the garden and have conversation with Him? Yes.
- Did not Jacob wrestle with the pre-Incarnate Christ in Genesis 32? Yes.
- Did not Moses see God in the burning bush of Exod. 3? Yes.
- Did not God hide Moses in the cleft of a rock and pass by showing Moses His back in Exod. 33? Yes.
- Did not Nebuchadnezzar see the pre-Incarnate Christ in the flaming furnace with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Dan. 3? Yes.
- Did not Isaiah see God Himself in Isa. 6? Yes.
- Did not the apostles walk and talk and see God for three years? Yes.
- Did not Paul say in 1 Cor. 9:1, "Have I not seen the Lord?" Yes.

How then can John say **No one has seen God at any time**? The solution is that what John means is that no one has ever seen God directly. God *has been seen indirectly* through filters; in the form of a man, in the form of fire, in the fire, in the flesh, in a cloud, but **no one has ever seen God at any time directly**. God has been seen indirectly through filters but never directly, for no one can see God directly. If one were to see God directly, without any filter he would die (Exod. 33:19-23).ⁱⁱ This is the consistent teaching of Scripture. This statement may seem a little out of place here in 1 John 4, but I assure you it is not. It is absolutely critical to understanding the passage. John is trying to communicate to us that God can be seen indirectly today through Christians. This has been one of John's goals in this epistle.

Let's back up to 1 John 2:29 so you can see the connection between John's statement that **no one has seen God at any time** and our passage which is talking about Christian's loving other Christians, turn back to **1 John 2:29 "If you know that He is righteous, you know**

that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.” This is another example of God being seen indirectly. Notice here that if one knows that God is righteous, then he will be able to detect righteousness when it is displayed. Do you see now that Christians who do righteousness are manifestations of God’s righteousness? God uses Christians to manifest Himself before men. Once again, God is never seen *directly*, but Christians who manifest righteousness are an *indirect* means of God manifesting Himself. Ultimately, this means that God is still making appearances today; not by visions or dreams or bodily appearances, but through the filter of Christians who do righteousness. When Christians do righteousness, God is making an appearance because all righteousness finds its source in God. When a Christian knows that God is righteous, he is able to detect God’s presence in another Christian when that Christian does righteousness!

Let me use an analogy to communicate what John is saying. I’ll use the analogy of a parent and child. When we know the character of a parent and then we see their child doing things that the parent does, then it can be said that we are seeing a manifestation of the parent through the child. In the same way, when we know the character of God and we see a child of God doing the things that God does, then it can be said that we are seeing a manifestation of God through the child of God.

This is ample proof that John may very well be more profound than Paul. He knew that God had revealed Himself through filters in the past but never directly and John knows the uniqueness of Church saints; that we have God dwelling among us and living through us. This demonstrates that John has a profound knowledge of God and extensive grasp of His word. His insight into this stunning theological truth is weighty indeed! How John put divine revelation together in such a profound way is hard to fathom.

Upon the basis that the invisible God makes Himself visible through the filter of Christians, John says **if we love one another, God abides in/among us**. This simply means that when we follow God’s commandment to love one another *spiritually* or *physically*, God, who no one has ever seen directly, is actively living in and through the Christian. The Christian becomes God’s tool for showing Himself to the world! This is the result of a local body of believers, like we have here at Fredericksburg Bible Church, loving one another. It may be said at that time that God is actively living among us when we **love one another**.

John goes on to say one more thing about loving one another and God’s abiding in us in this verse: When this takes place, God’s **love has been perfected in us**. **Perfected** is in the perfect tense (a completed action having present results). He perfected us once for all at the moment we believed (justification) but that justification is having present results. When

we love one another, God's love is being *reproduced* in us. We have become conduits of God's love and reflections of the divine essence. No one has seen God at any time but God can be seen indirectly when Christians do righteousness particularly in the form of Christian love that reflects the love of the Savior.

Greek Text 4:13 'En touto ginokomen hoti en auto menomen kai autos en humin, hoti ek tou pneumatou autou dedoken humin.

Translation 4:13 By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

Carefully compare 4:12-13 with 3:24. They almost say the same thing. However, here in 4:12-13 he replaces **keeping His commandments** with **loving one another**. But **keeping His commandments** and **loving one another** are really not so different at all; they are but two sides of the same coin! To **be obedient** is to **love** and the Christian who **loves** is **obedient**. Christian love and Christian obedience always go together.

There is one other significant difference between these two verses. 3:24 says that God gave us the Spirit, but in 4:13 He says **He gave us of His Spirit**. This is different. In 3:24 it means that God gave us the indwelling Holy Spirit. But here in 4:13 it means that it is apparent when we are abiding in Him that we have this Spirit because it is the Holy Spirit who produces in us God's love. When such love is produced in the Christian life, it is the Holy Spirit that is manifesting the reality of God through us. We don't manifest God, but the Holy Spirit whom God has given us manifests God in us.ⁱⁱⁱ

Greek Text 4:14 kai hemeis tetheametha kai marturomen hoti o pater apostalke ton huion soterou tou kosmou.

Translation 4:14 And we^{iv} have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.

Finally, we come to 1 John 4:14. This is the most important verse for understanding John's epistle. This is the height of John's argument and this verse ties everything in the epistle together. Clearly, this verse should remind us of the prologue (1:1-4). It suggests the apostolic experience of seeing and testifying that Jesus Christ was sent into the world to be the Savior of the world. But we should recall a few more things about the prologue.

What was from the beginning, *what* we have heard, *what* we have seen with our eyes, *what* we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life-- ² and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to

you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us-- ³ what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.

This was a hard passage because of v. 1. It's clear that John has the incarnation of Jesus Christ in mind, but is that what the four *what* clauses are referring too? If you recall those four *what* clauses are in the neuter. If John was referring to Jesus Christ, he would have used the masculine; but he chose the neuter. Why? Because while John has Jesus Christ in mind, he is actually referring to something else; something definitely related to Jesus Christ, but something else. That something else is found at the end of v. 1 and in v. 2. He's talking about **life** (v. 1), and the kind of life that John is talking about is described in v. 2 as **eternal life** (v. 2). Of course, Jesus Christ is eternal life (1 John 5:20), but what John is really referring to here in v. 1-2 is **eternal life** itself. Keep that in mind.

Now look at v. 3, a key verse to this epistle. "*what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us.* Most people think that all John meant here was that John wanted to tell his readers about what the apostles had seen and heard so that his readers could know what the apostles knew (just a transfer of information). But John actually means much more than this. He wants his readers to both see and hear what the apostles saw and heard. Okay, I can see how we could hear it, we have the word of God for that! But how can we see what the apostles saw? We say, "This is impossible because Jesus is ascended to the right hand of the Father. Jesus is no longer making appearances!" But if we are to have fellowship with the apostles in what the apostles had **seen**, then how are we to do this if Jesus Christ is no longer around? Well, the key to all this is that we cannot see the person of Jesus Christ Himself, but what we can see is "**the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested**" to the apostles. We can see **eternal life** because God gives us **eternal life** when we believe. When we express God's character through Christian love, we are manifesting **eternal life**! This is where John's major argument of the epistle is going. Everything from 2:29 leading up to the present verse has been laying the groundwork for this idea.

Remember, in 2:29 I showed you that when a Christian does righteousness, there is a true, but filtered manifestation of God because all righteousness comes from God. Then in 3:10b John moved from doing righteousness in general to a specific act of righteousness; **loving** our **brothers** in Christ. When we **love** our Christian **brothers** sacrificially, there is a manifestation of God because God is love and all love comes from God. Therefore, when we love one another, we are *re-manifesting* **eternal life**, that same **eternal life** that was

with the Father and was manifested to the apostles! We can see **eternal life** right before our eyes! In this way Christians can say, just like the apostles said, that they **have seen that the Father sent the Son as Savior of the world**. We truly can see **eternal life** in the now as it is manifested in Christians, and this is how we can have “fellowship” with the apostles in what was both seen (eternal life v. 14) and heard (a common confession v. 15). and with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world!

John is a very profound writer. That’s why I tell you that when it comes right down to it John may be more difficult than Paul. Anyone who thinks they have plumbed the depths of the Word of God is plumb crazy. Anyone who thinks Bible study is easy hasn’t studied enough. This is tough stuff! The Bible is the most profound book ever written and these ideas here are some of the most profound ideas in the Bible.

Let me return to the analogy of the parent and the child because this is what helps us understand John’s thinking. When we know the character of a parent and we see their child doing things that the parent does then it can be said that we are seeing a manifestation of the parent through the child. In the same way, when we know the character of God and we see a child of God doing the things that God does, then it can be said that we are seeing a manifestation of God through the child of God.

Since we have received eternal life from God, when we love our Christian brothers and sisters, the eternal life of God is being expressed in the here and now. “In other words, the visible manifestation of *eternal life* through Christian love, so that this *life* can be **seen** in that love, is an enormously effective way to **testify** about the Saviorhood of Christ.”^v Like a child is a living witness of his parents, so we as Christians are living witnesses of God. On a closing note, F.F. Bruce says, “The love of God displayed in His people is the strongest apologetic that God has in the world.”^{vi}

ⁱ Hodges, Zane, *The Epistles of John* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 188.

ⁱⁱ For those who want to go deeper on the subject of no one seeing God here are some further references and explanations. Moses spoke with the Lord “face to face” (Exod. 33:11). The phrase “face to face” is a Hebrew idiom meaning “openly and clearly” as a friend speaks to a friend, it does not mean that Moses saw God’s face. Later on, in Exod. 33:19ff God says to Moses you cannot see my face or you will die! Seeing God’s face and speaking face to face are two different things in the Hebrew language. John 1:18 says that no one has seen God at any time but that the one-of-a-kind Son of God has explained Him. The interesting thing about this verse is the word “explained”. It’s the Greek verb *exegeomai* from which we get the theological term “exegesis”. The Son of God was an exegesis of God. This means he was an in-depth explanation of God to men. Again, Jesus Christ was a filter through which God was seen but God has never been seen directly. Jesus also says “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). This means they are one in essence, a reference to the divine nature as signified by the neuter for the Greek word “one”. In one NT discourse, “Philip said to Him, “Lord,

show us the Father, and it is enough for us." ⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how *can* you say, 'Show us the Father '?" ¹⁰ "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me?" (John 14:8-11). Again though, the Father is seen here through the filter of human flesh of Jesus Christ and His teachings.

ⁱⁱⁱ This is another reason the Church is distinct from Israel. God manifested Himself in the world in many different ways to Israel but those ways are absolutely distinct from how He reveals Himself now. He now reveals Himself through Christians and the way He does this is by giving them the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit. OT Israelite believers did not have the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit. It began on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). The Church and Israel are distinct.

^{iv} The key to interpreting this verse is the pronoun **we**. Who does **we** refer too? Does it refer to the apostles only (exclusive use) or to the apostles and the readers (inclusive use)? Two reasons indicate that it refers to the apostles and the readers (inclusive use). *First*, from 4:7 to the present verse it has been referring to the apostles and the readers. *Second*, there is *no* shift from **we** to **you** in the close context to indicate that he's not including his readers.

^v Hodges, Zane, *The Epistles of John* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 193.

^{vi} Bruce, F. F. *The Epistles of John*. (London: Pickering & Inglis Ltd., 1970; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 109.

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