

That You May Know

*And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.
(1 John 2:3 ESV)*

*We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers.
(1 John 3:14 ESV)*

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God,
that you may know that you have eternal life.
(1 John 5:13 ESV)*

An Ode To Love
November 1st, 2020
1 John 4:7-5:5
Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning everyone! I hope you brought your Bible with you and that you are able to open it now to 1 John 4:7. I love what F.F. Bruce says by way of introduction to this passage. He says:

“Like Paul in 1 Corinthians 13, John in this section has his hymn in praise of heavenly love.”¹

That’s exactly what this is! This is not an argument – John already made the argument in chapter 3. In chapter he said that God is our Father through faith in Jesus Christ and therefore the REAL CHILDREN OF GOD are renouncing sin and loving one another and as they do that God draws near to them and they have confidence in prayer and a greater experience of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

Then in verses 1-6 of chapter 4 John anticipates an objection:

“But Pastor John, what about the heretics that went out from us? They’re having a powerful experience of the Holy Spirit too – does that prove that they are the real children of God?”

¹ F.F. Bruce, *The Gospels & Epistles Of John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 106.

So John answers that objection, he says: “No! Having a powerful SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE doesn’t prove anything because there are TWO SPIRITS active in the world. The Spirit of God and the spirit of antichrist.” And he gives us a little checklist that we can use to evaluate our spiritual experiences – we talked about that last week.

But now, with the argument made and the objection anticipated John is free to return to his favourite – the glory and the beauty of LOVE.

Hear now the Word of the Lord beginning at verse 7 and reading all the way down to verse 5 of chapter 5.

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.

¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.¹⁶ So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.¹⁷ By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world.¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.¹⁹ We love because he first loved us.²⁰ If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.²¹ And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

¹ Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.² By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.³ For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.⁴ For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our

faith.⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 4:7–5:5 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

An Ode To Love

As I said, there is not a great deal of structure here – this is less an argument to be explained and more a celebration to be entered into. So let's do that - let's pick some blossoms from this glorious bush in bloom. We won't have time to get to all of them, but let's take a look at a few of the most obvious and eye catching.

The first thing he says about love is that:

1. Love is a reliable test of faith

You can see that in verses 7-8. John says:

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. (1 John 4:7–8 ESV)

Again – this assumes the argument of chapter 3. There John said that REAL BELIEVERS are BORN OF GOD – they have the SEED OF GOD in them! And the SEED OF GOD is a powerful force - the Word Bible Commentary says that the SEED OF GOD:

“is responsible for the Christian growth and potentially sinless character of each believer.”²

So there is something in you that is DRAWING YOU OUT OF certain acts and behaviours – and that is DIRECTING YOU TOWARDS certain acts and behaviours and chief among those is LOVE for the people of God. This FORCE is so powerful and this movement is SO ASSURED that it is treated in the Bible as definitive proof of faith.

² Stephen S. Smalley, *1,2,3 John* in Word Biblical Commentary Volume 51, (Waco: Word Books Publishers, 1984), 173.

That's the whole point of the story of the Sheep and the Goats. Jesus says that on the Day of Judgment he will separate people like a shepherd separates sheep and goats:

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?'⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' (Matthew 25:34–40 ESV)

Are you hearing that?

The real Christians – the sheep – didn't even realize what they were doing – it was entirely INSTINCTUAL. They didn't THINK IT THROUGH – they just did it. They were DRAWN towards the needs of other believers without even really understanding why they were doing what they were doing.

The SEED OF GOD was in them and it was causing them to do godly things.

That's why in the Bible Judgment is ALWAYS according to works.

Now hear that. You are saved by faith – but you are judged by works.

This is everywhere in the Bible. Romans 2:8-9 says:

He will render to each one according to his works:⁷ to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life;⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. (Romans 2:6–8 ESV)

So we are saved by GRACE but judged by WORKS – how does that go together?

The answer is simple.

The grace that God gives includes HIS DIVINE NATURE EMBEDDED IN US. It is the most powerful force in the universe – so if you have it – IT WILL SHOW. It will produce FRUIT in keeping with repentance and that's why judgment can be and WILL BE according to works. Because fruit don't lie. And greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.

And that's why love for the brothers and sisters of Christ will be treated as reliable evidence of saving faith on the Last Day.

The second thing John says here about love is that:

2. Love is what God says and shows it to be

John LOVES LOVE – but he wants to be clear, he LOVES LOVE as God defines it and shows it in the person and work of Christ.

John doesn't say that he loves your love.

John doesn't say that he loves 21st century North American cultural love.

He says he LOVES God's love.

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. (1 John 4:9–10 ESV)

That's the love that God is talking about here. And what a love! It is sacrificial, it is generous and it is pure. It is a love that is FOR PEOPLE and AGAINST SIN – that's God LOVE.

We have this idea in our culture now that to love people you have to be FOR their sin. Well tell that to the cross of Jesus Christ. In the cross of Jesus Christ God is saying: “I am FOR YOU and against your sin.”

You aren't loving people God's way unless you are prepared to say the same.

It is not loving to affirm sin.

Sin destroys.

Sin leads to death – either the death of Christ on the cross or the death of the individual for all eternity.

To hide that fact from people is not loving.

All love in the Bible – is pure and TRUTH TELLING.

You can see that in the Old Testament – in Leviticus 19 – in the original “love your neighbour” passage the Bible says:

“You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. ¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I *am* the LORD.” (Leviticus 19:17–18 NKJV)

So if you want to love people like I love people, God says, then rebuke them and forgive them as necessary. That's GOD LOVE. You see God is everything he is in everything he does – so he doesn't stop being holy in order to be loving. We think we have to do that – but that is not how you love people like God loves people.

God's love is pure and it tells the truth.

The third thing John says about love here is that:

3. Love for others is the correct response to God's love for us in Christ

It's not just the standard, it's the motivation. God's true children want to imitate their Father's character. So John says:

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 John 4:11 ESV)

Let's do it! Let's be like dad on this.

Peter said the same thing – taking note of God's holiness. He said:

as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,¹⁶ since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." (1 Peter 1:15–16 ESV)

Old Testament and New – Apostle to Apostle – the call is the same. Children are to imitate the character of their Father. God is holy – you be holy. God is love - you love.

There is no surer indicator of faith and no more obvious indicator of respect than for blood bought children to imitate the character of their Heavenly Father.

The fourth thing John says here is that:

4. Love gives us confidence on the Day of Judgment

Look at verse 17:

By this is love perfected with us, **so that** we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. (1 John 4:17 ESV)

Now as I said, this passage is more like a song to be enjoyed than an argument to be dissected – and that's true – but there is a little argument inside this little song – you can see it for yourself.

The “BY THIS” at the start of verse 17 refers back to the AGENCY mentioned at the end of verse 16:

God abides in him. (1 John 4:16 ESV)

That’s the SEED OF GOD that we’ve been talking about since 1 John 3:9. In a real believer – GOD ABIDES IN HIM.

That’s the POWER; the PRESENCE that Stephen Smalley said:

“is implanted in the person who is spiritually reborn, and which is responsible for the Christian growth and potentially sinless character of each believer.”³

So there is this a POWER and a PRESENCE IN YOU that is DRIVING YOU TOWARD growth, fruit and godly character SO THAT we may have confidence for the day of judgment.

Are you seeing the argument?

Remember, John has already said that love for other believers IS reliable evidence of saving faith – so if the SEED OF GOD IN YOU produces more and more of that love THEN if you let it do its work you will have NO REASON WHATSOEVER to be afraid of the coming Day of the Lord.

It won’t be a Day of Terror for you – it will be a day of JOY and CELEBRATION.

Colin Kruse says here:

“Believers who love one another in this world, in the same way as Christ loved his disciples (John 13:1, 34; 15:9, 12) when he was in the world, show that they live in God, and therefore they need have no fear as they face the day of judgement.”⁴

³ Stephen S. Smalley, *1,2,3 John* in Word Biblical Commentary Volume 51, (Waco: Word Books Publishers, 1984), 173.

⁴ Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 168.

Isn't that good?

That's the meaning of that often-misquoted statement in verse 18:

perfect love casts out fear. (1 John 4:18 ESV)

John isn't saying that because God is love no one needs to be afraid of Judgment Day – no some people should be afraid. After all, as it says in the New Testament:

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:31 ESV)

So some people SHOULD be afraid of Judgment Day – you'd be a fool not to be – but what John is saying here is that as the fruit of love grows and ripens on your branches, the evidence for the reality of your ROOT OF FAITH becomes overwhelming and it completely removes any cause for fear or apprehension with respect to the coming Day of the Lord.

You'll be fine. Your branches are literally BOWED DOWN under the weight of proving fruit.

Perfect love drives out fear.

The fifth thing John says about love is that:

5. Love reaches out to others who are loved

Now remember the backstory here: a big group of people had HIVED OFF from the church of Jesus Christ and started a rival movement. John spoke about that back in chapter 2:

“They went out from us, but they were not of us” (1 John 2:19 ESV)

These people did not believe in the BODILY ASPECTS of the historic Apostolic confession of Christ. They didn't believe that Jesus was the Christ. Historians tells us that in this heresy which later in its development came to be known as Gnosticism, there was this idea that the Christ Spirit descended upon Jesus of Nazareth at his baptism but then left Jesus such that when Jesus died on

the cross he was not the Christ. He was just a man and he died as a man and he stayed dead. The Christ Spirit ascended to heaven and is now seated, as it were, at the Father's right hand.

But that's nonsense John says. That's not the Gospel. The Gospel is that JESUS IS THE CHRIST. The Gospel is the Good News of what God has done in Jesus Christ for our salvation. So if you don't accept that – as preached by the Apostles – then you are not saved. You don't have the SEED OF GOD IN YOU. That's why he says:

Everyone who believes that **Jesus is the Christ** has been born of God (1 John 5:1 ESV)

If you believe the Apostolic confession of Jesus, then you are born again!! You have the Seed of God in you – now look at what he says next:

“and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.” (1 John 5:1 ESV)

Do you see that? Every born-again person loves every other born-again person.

It's like this. Imagine the world as a giant LEGO table. Now imagine that on that table there are hundreds and hundreds of little red balls. They are all mixed up together all over the table.

But now imagine that some of those balls are made of wood and some of those balls are actually little metal magnets. They have a FORCE in them – a POWER that is drawn to the SAME POWER in the other little red metal balls.

Now imagine that a GIANT came along and picked up one end of the table and gave it a massive shake and all the balls started moving around. What do you think would happen? All the magnetic metal balls would begin to seek each other out. They would push through the crowd and begin to gather in little clusters – isn't that exactly what would happen?

Well, John says, that actually IS exactly what is happening and what will happen. God is going to shake the earth. “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens” (Hebrews

12:26 ESV), God says. And when I do – all those little red balls – all the true children of God with the Presence and POWER of God inside them are going to seek each other out and cluster together in little groups of love and Gospel fellowship.

That's what is going to happen – because love reaches out to others who are loved by God.

The sixth thing that John says here is that:

6. Love flows within the banks of the law

Look at verse 3:

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. (1 John 5:3 ESV)

You see the LOVE of God and the commandments of God are not opposed to each other – not in the Bible – so they ought not to be in our minds. Love and law go together!

The 10 Commandments show us how to love God and each other. It's not loving to God to harbour rivals to God in your heart – that's commandment #1 and 2. It's not loving to God to neglect our times of worship – that's commandment #4. It's not loving to your parents to rebel against them or to neglect them in their old age – that's commandment #5. It's not loving to your wife to have sex with other women – that's commandment #7. It's not loving to your fellow citizen to lie and to slander them in the court of law – that's commandment #9.

Do you see that?

Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. (Romans 13:10 ESV)

Seventh – last thing, I want to show you here is that:

7. Love turns away and love turns toward

You can see that in verse 4 of chapter 5:

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. (1 John 5:4 ESV)

F.F. Bruce again is really helpful here, he says:

“The new life imparted to members of the family of God carries with it a new desire to do His will and a new power to give effect to that desire. Not only so, this new power enables them to ‘overcome the world’ – everything that is opposed to God.”⁵

There are competing ATTRACTIONS in this fallen world – John talked about that back in chapter 2; the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, the pride of life – those things are calling out to fallen human beings everywhere. But we have a stronger force inside of us. The new life – the SEED OF GOD – embeds in us and RELEASES IN US new desires and new POWERS to pursue those desires. This is what enables us to turn away from the ATTRACTIONS of the world and to come together on the old Gospel path in real Christian love and fellowship.

An Implication And An Application:

That’s the passage! That’s John’s Ode To Love. Now this may be John’s hymn in praise of heavenly love, but it still makes demands upon the children of God living down here on planet earth so in the few minutes we have left I want to leave you with one implication and one application.

Let’s begin with our implication. Given everything John has said in this passage – and given everything John has been saying over the course the entire letter, I think it would be fair to say that:

1. It is impossible to over-estimate the importance of being born again

⁵ F.F. Bruce, *The Gospels & Epistles Of John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 117.

You cannot leave sin behind and you cannot live a life of sacrificial love for your brothers and sisters in Christ on the strength of your own WILL and DETERMINATION. As we talked about last week – apostasy is either inevitable or impossible depending on whether or not you have the SEED OF GOD IN YOU – well so is loving your brothers and sisters in Christ. So is everything we’re supposed to do as Christians.

Our human nature does not naturally lean in Kingdom ways. That’s why Jesus said:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3 ESV)

Your natural instincts will not lead you down this road. You must be born again.

So if you aren’t born again – if there is no power or impulse in you that is slowly but surely overcoming your attraction to the world and leading you towards new loves, priorities and affections, then there is only one thing for you to do. You need to fall on your face today and say: “O GOD! Have mercy on me a sinner! O God be born in my heart I pray.”

The scriptures say:

“a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.” (Psalm 51:17 KJV)

Pray for the Holy Spirit to break your heart and for the Seed of God to be born in you! That’s the only thing that matters. That’s the only hope for fallen sinners.

Now, to those who have already been born again, I want to challenge you to eliminate absolutely everything that stands in the way of the Divine instinct.

2. Eliminate everything that stands in the way of Divine instinct

There is a power and a presence in you pushing and prompting you towards love. But it can be resisted and impeded so get rid of every hindrance and obstruction.

What sort of things are we talking about here?

Well for me it is hurry and busy-ness. I'm always in a hurry, I always have things to do and therefore, far too often I only notice NEEDS in my rear-view mirror after it is too late for me to stop and do anything about it.

I need to slow down – that's my impediment.

What's yours?

Is it hurry for you or is it noise? Noise from the culture, noise from Facebook, noise from the agitated MASSES. Are you so caught up in issues OUT THERE that you are missing out on opportunities to love and care for people IN HERE?

Then get rid of it. Get off Facebook. Get off the internet. Unplug. Get your thoughts out of cyberspace and get your hands and your feet dirty in here.

Whatever your impediment; brother, sister - get rid of it.

Let love be perfected in you. There is a DESIRE and a POWER from God at work in you to do that which is pleasing to him. So weed your garden, clear your path – and let it grow.

It will adorn the Gospel presentation of this church, it will commend the love of Christ to your friends and neighbours and it will allow you to look with confidence for the coming and the judgment of the Lord.

Thanks be to God, let's pray together.

