

**1st John 3: 16-20; “By This We Know love”, Sermon # 15 in a series entitled –
“Behold What Manner of Love”, A Communion Sermon delivered by
Pastor Paul Rendall on March 11th, 2018,
in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

The last time we were together we spoke about the truth that the children of God and the children of the devil are manifested by the things that they do. The child of the devil is manifest by his evil works. And he has no love for those who practice righteousness. He has envy and self-seeking in his heart which lead him to have anger, jealousy, and even murder in his heart. The example of Cain killing Abel is used by John. He says that we should not marvel that the world hates us as true Christians. Cain hated Abel because Abel's deeds were righteous. People of the world who do not know God may even be very religious, and yet filled with malice and hatred in their hearts, and attitudes, and actions. This is one of the sure indications of a false religion. The people of the world, like Cain, want to either neglect and despise the way of the Lord, or they want to force other people to their conclusions of how life ought to be lived. Their conclusion is that life is to be lived to themselves and their own ideas of God, rather than God's idea of them, and what is right and true and good for them to be doing, which is found in the Bible. This is sin against God and it is a form of persecution in relation to God's true people. There is a hatred of God's people in their hearts because they have not truly come to know God. And they have not come to know to know the way of love.

But the only way that unbelieving people will come to know the love of God is if it is shown and demonstrated to them. This is one of the chief things that we are called to do as children of God, as a part of our witness for Christ; to manifest the love of God in tangible ways. The question that we want to consider tonight is this: How do we know what love is, so that we can manifest it to the brethren and others? Well, I think that we can understand some of the basics of what love is, by looking at these verses, and the truth that we will find here will be helpful to us when we come to partake of the Lord's Supper.

1st of all – We know what love is by what the Lord Jesus did for us.

Verse 16 – “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us.” “And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” Love begins with looking at Christ and what He did for us who have come to know Him. That is one of the main reasons that He died, so that we could personally know this love of God towards us, and that having that love at work in our hearts, that we would then love others. What did Christ's love consist of? Well, let's start where our Lord started, with His relationship to God His Father. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Love began with the Father giving His only-begotten Son, giving His very heart, to a world of sinful men that they might be saved. Before the foundation of the world, the Son was in the bosom of the Father; loved and cherished as His only Begotten. But the Son had to respond to the plan of His being sent to a world of lost and fallen sinners and He did.

The Lord Jesus was not only willing to go along with the Father's plan, but He was very desirous to accomplish this great work Himself. “Out of the ivory palaces and into a world of woe,” says the hymn writer. It was no exaggeration. It would involve a great humbling of Himself at many points to accomplish it; but this is where true love begins, with humility. We can see the righteous and holy mindset that He adopted when He as a man realized what He was going to need to do to accomplish our being saved from our sins. Turn with me to Philippians 2: 1-8. Here the Apostle Paul is exhorting the Christians at Philippi to have a right mindset and right attitudes towards their fellow believers in the church there. He begins with stating certain motives. “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same

love, being of one accord, of one mind.” “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” The way that Paul states that this will come about is found in verse 5 and following. “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God did not consider it robbery to equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bond-servant, and coming in the likeness of men.” “And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

Jesus Christ was not stealing any glory away from God the Father or God the Spirit to think of Himself as being God. He was God in substance and essence as the 2nd Person of the Divine Trinity. But when He agreed to take upon himself the form of a man, and to be made in the likeness of sinful flesh, to come into this world in the likeness of men, there certainly must have been a great love in his heart to do so. He was not doing this for Himself but for the Father and for those who would be “given to Him” by the Father in Electing love. It was this act of love, that He would voluntarily subject Himself to taking upon Himself human nature, that would place Him in the position, and lead Him into, all the sufferings that He would undergo on behalf of every sinner who would put their trust in Him, and all the rest of the Elect who had no way of believing for themselves unto justification.

It was the love of Jesus Christ for sinners that caused him to leave the life of perfect bliss in the glory of heaven; to leave the unutterable and inexpressible glory of His relationship with the Father, and His relationship with the Holy Spirit, to come into the realm of fallen mankind. It was that love that brought him to the place where He was a helpless babe in the manger at Bethlehem. It was that love that caused him then to “make himself of no reputation”. He was not trying to be seen as somebody great, but He was great. He deliberately studied to see how he could not be seen by men as great, for the first 30 years of his life. He was faithful in being nobody special. This is why it was so surprising to the people when it was understood by them that He was someone unusual and unique among men. They did not want to believe it.

In Matthew 13: 54-56 it says, “When He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, ‘Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works?’ “Is this not the carpenter’s son?” “Is not His mother called Mary?” “And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?” “And his sisters, are they not all with us?” “Where then did this man get all these things?” It was love to men’s souls that He made Himself of no reputation. How can you really serve God and His kingdom when you are proud? You can’t, because it is all about yourself and what you can do or what you want to become. But Jesus laid down his life of greatness so that He could become a bondservant; to obey perfectly for us, and to suffer for us. He would become obedient to the point of death on a cross.

This is love, laying down your life so that someone else besides yourself benefits from what you do. And you do this because you care for others with a sacrificial love; that which is produced in you by looking at Jesus and praying for the grace to lay down what you would want in your fleshly mind and heart. “And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” All apostolic teaching agrees about this. This is why Paul can say, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition and empty conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” It is because this is love, and this is Christ.

2nd – We know that true Christian love abides in us when our hearts go out to brethren in need, and we then do something tangible to help them. (Verse 17 and 18)

“But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?” “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and truth.” Now, let us understand that all the world has needs. Christians are not called upon to meet all of them. “The poor you will always have with you”, Jesus says in Matthew 26: 11. But let us also understand that the Christian is commanded to do

good to all. Galatians 6: 10 says, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” We are to do good to all men, but especially to those who are Christian brethren. If a Christian “has this world’s goods”; that is, if he has enough to meet his own needs financially, and has income and possessions enough to minister to others, he ought to study to see how he can help others. This is not something that is to be judged by unbelievers and outsiders as if this is our duty to help the poor irregardless of their own responsibility to seek to find work, to work hard, and to provide for themselves. “Each one shall bear their own load,” it says in Galatians 6: 5. If we ourselves have needs and not much of this world’s goods, we ought to pray and seek to understand how we can make progress in our job situation so that we can provide for ourselves and others in our immediate family and extended family. “If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” (1st Timothy 5: 8)

But a Christian should at all times have feelings of sympathy which will translate into deeds of mercy and charity when the situation requires it. His or her heart does go out to other brethren in need, and they will remember the command to “bear one another’s burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6: 2) Their heart is not “shut up” to the needs of others in the church, and others in the larger body of Christ. The loving Christian will pray and ask, “Lord, what would you have me to do?” It will not be a love of word only, but of deed also. The Lord will providentially bring people in need, your way, to test your Christian love and to see whether it is real or if it is in word only. James chapter 2, verse 14 and following shows this. “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?” “Can that faith save him?” “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled, but you do not give them the things that they need for the body, what does it profit?’”

It is essential to Christian love to give to the brethren those things that are needful for the body, if they have these needs and cannot provide for themselves. However, it is not the duty of the Christian Church to be a social work agency and provide for the on-going needs of persons who have no interest in following the will and the way of the Lord. We need to be wise in this regard and not allow any person to take advantage of Christian love and generosity to insist that it is the duty of the church to take on providing for the needs of society's poor in general. It is not the responsibility of the Church to bail people out of their own financial irresponsibility. The leaders of the church need to guard against this feeling obligated to help those who are not willing to learn the Biblical way to organize their finances and to spend their money wisely. The Church does have the duty to teach those who will come to them for help in difficult and desperate financial conditions, those who do want to learn the way of the Lord, the principles of truth that will teach them to be responsible and diligent in solving their own problems and living in a way that is pleasing to God and where they can come to the place where they are helping others.

Our hearts condemning us or not condemning us is a very important component in all of this, as we see in verse 20. If a Christian loves in word only, their heart will condemn them that they are not giving and doing as the Lord would have them to give and to do. Our conscience must of course be governed and instructed by the principles of truth from the Scripture that relate to each case of need of the people that come our way. May the Lord help our church and her leaders to wisely consider what to do in each and every case of need that comes before us. If any Christian is wise, generous, loving and giving in their practice of righteousness in the Christian life, then they shall find it to be a great means of assurance. We can know that we are of the truth and shall assure our hearts before God that it is so when we “love in deed and in truth.” Let us come down front now and gather to partake of the Supper.

3rd – As we come now to remember our Lord Jesus, let us remember that He and the Father know all things.

Verse 20 says – “For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.” I suppose that a true Christian will never think that they have done enough in terms of helping and giving to people in need; and at points, their heart will condemn them when it should not. And that is why John says in verse 20 that “if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart and knows all things”. God will speak peace to the hearts of his praying and thoughtful people as they strive to do his will. We shall grow to have a greater confidence in prayer through doing what we know to be right, out of love to the brethren and others in need. The way that we assure our hearts before God is to remember why God the Father sent the Son into the world. He did so because He knew that even though forgiven of all of our sins, that our conscience would at times condemn us so that we cannot have confidence before God. But this is where the blood of Christ comes into play in your life, dear Christian. It is applied to cover all of your inconsistencies in your obedience; all of those things which may make you think that God cannot possibly put up with your sinful weaknesses any longer.

Remember, dear Christian, God knows your heart better than you do even. Your heart may condemn you, but God is greater than your heart and He remembers what Christ has done in perfect righteousness and agonizing sufferings on your behalf. The Father will not condemn the sorrowful repentant Christian; the Christian who is resolved by Christ’s grace to do better and be more consistent. He knows the thoughts and intents of your heart, and He knows when you sincerely desire to do His will in all things, and are trying to obey Him at every point. He knows what Christ suffered so that He will be able to perfect you, inch by inch and step by step, until you arrive at the gates of heaven and enter His glory. And you will be blameless with great joy at that point because you will realize better what Christ has done for you.