

1 John 4:9-11 (NKJV)

⁹ In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.

¹⁰ In this is love, not that we 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.

Last week we focused on the love/doctrine/love sandwich. We emphasized how we cannot separate our ideas of love from the doctrine the Bible teaches. This morning I would like to delve into this same text a little more.

Remember how we talked early on about how John would end up teaching us doctrine without us even being aware of it. Well this passage is a perfect illustration.

We looked at the word propitiation last week. Christ was receiving **God's wrath in our place**. That shows us several things.

First it shows the goodness of Christ.

When God says that He is love, here is an example of the **kind of love** that God has for us. Christ came to this earth for one primary purpose. He came to **meet the need of sinners like us**. And here Christ is, **manifesting** that love. Think about it, if God just had love for us, but never **manifested** it, His love would not have done us a lick of good. In order for it to do us **good**, it had to be **manifested**.

We see this **inactive** kind of love revealed as being **no love at all** throughout scripture. If we see a brother in need and do not reach out to meet that need, it is not love. That is not the kind of love that God is. God's love manifests itself. If it did not, it would not be **love**.

In verse 2 we did not focus on something that I would like to look at now. **1**

John 4:2 (NKJV)

² Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God,

The verb tenses, and the way this is worded, makes it very clear. Christ **existed** before He came to earth. Christ **pre-existed**. He has come in the flesh. This is a very clear statement of the deity of Christ. This is part of the test for false teaching. Any doctrine that holds that Christ was just a this, or just a that, but not **really God** is false doctrine.

Now we are talking about the goodness of Christ. Christ had every opportunity to remain where He was. I know of only one compulsion that drove Him here. It was His love for us. That is the kind of God we serve. That

is His character. It isn't just an ethereal intention. It is force that gets needs met. And God is that.

Christ should be our **hero** in this. He should be our **model**. We can look to Him and be confident that **He knows all about this love**. We can **follow His model**, as much as it lies in our power to do so, and we can be confident we are doing the right thing. We can follow His teaching and know that, no matter what we perceive or feel about this thing, we are doing the right thing. Christ is the **love hero**. Christ is the **love manifestation**. He is our eternal lover. We can fix our eyes on Him and be sure we are focused on the right thing. Christ is good.

At the same time as Christ's goodness, His desire and passion to meet our need, we can also be certain that we had a **real need** that needed **met**. There was **wrath**, wrath we **completely deserved**, that he **propitiated**. The propitiation was not for dramatic effect. It was absolutely necessary in Christ's display of love. Without propitiation, the effect of meeting our need would have been **ineffective**, it would have been **incomplete**. And that could never be. We know that Christ does all things well. His love is effective. It gets the job done. So propitiation was a **necessary act of love**.

What that emphasizes is the doctrine we have looked at many times. It is the depravity of man. It is the **wonderful truth** about a **terrible thing**. It is a terrible thing because sin, in its very nature, is abhorrent to God. He hates it. He despises it. It stinks to Him. And if we look around through God's eyes we can see why. Compare our lives to life in the Garden of Eden. Every negative thing that **did not exist in the garden** that **exists now** is because of sin. Sin destroys. It corrupts. It distorts. It ruins. It kills. And we were created for something better than that. In a recent Bible study where Suz and I were discussing God's will, the one thing we completely agreed upon was that it is ultimately **God's loving intention** that one day we be free of all the negative consequences of sin. God is like that. God wants good for His people. We were created for life without sin. We are created for utter and continual happiness. And praise God **He** will one day deliver on that promise.

Now I said the depravity of man is a wonderful truth about a terrible thing. This is a wonderful truth because it explains our world to us. We look at the news. What explains it? Well there might be some noble things attempted by some well meaning people. But the fact that there are **no lasting solutions** is explained by the **depravity of man**. When we discover in our lives that we **intend** better than we **do**, and we look inside for an answer, God's word beats us to the punch. The depravity of man. We need not be shocked. We don't even have to waste time being aghast at ourselves. We can agree with

scripture and say that, yes, apart from the work of Christ on my life, this is predictable. This is what my fleshly nature produces. It is not reason to despair. I need not flee. I have a **solution**. I have a **remedy**. I have a tree of spiritual life I can run to. And it is the one who paid the propitiation for our sins. We run to our **captain of love**. We run to the Savior of our souls. So while the **depravity** is not **wonderful**, it was so very gracious of God to explain this truth to us. It keeps us from **despair**. It gives us direction and a reason to hope. Freeing us from our depraved state is why Christ came to our planet. He came to seek and to save those who are lost. Praise God. So while our first two verses in our text speak about love, they are also laying out some much needed doctrine.

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We see the lostness of mankind and the love of God that manifested through a plan that would meet our greatest need. We needed a way to be right with God. And Christ delivered it.

And then to make it clear John emphasizes from **where** this transaction **originates**. When we look at our salvation, we must proclaim this truth if we are honest. Love is what **God did**. It is not what **I did**. Christ **met** the need. We had our need **met**. We were His enemies. We ran from His love. He loved us anyway. That is the way scripture describes the plight of mankind over and over. In our salvation, **Christ** initiated all the loving.

Ok. That is all true. And then we respond to this wonderful salvation. And it does something to us. We find ourselves wanting to serve this God, to love this God.

But then we experience the real world.

I want to be liked. And I say and do things to **be liked**. And I am guessing that all of you want to be liked as well. But the truth is, if you put enough people in a group, there will be some that are unlikeable to some people. I often talk to pastors of bigger churches who have people who make it very difficult for them. And frankly, they don't like the people who seem to always be a problem or an obstacle. I thank God sometimes that we are so small. I don't feel that way toward any of you, at least not on a regular basis. But it is often a problem in a church. Maybe you don't like me. I have a lot **not** to like. So I could understand that. These are human dynamics. And there is no need to beat ourselves up over how we might feel.

All we need to do is look at verse 11.

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

Here is the answer to wondering how to respond to conflicting thoughts and feelings.

Put yourself in this situation.

A believer is not treating you the way you think you should be treated. If you are married you might want to use that setting, since this happens often.

Now, when I am not **responded to** in a way I think I **should** be responded to, instead of giving way to the instinctive feeling I have, instead of speaking or acting or reacting immediately, I stop myself. I stop right where I am. And I think. I apply this truth in the way it is intended to be applied.

Now what should I think?

I start with **Christ**, not with me, or the other person, or what I feel. I start with **Christ**.

We ask the question- **How did Christ love me?** Well, while I was mistreating Him he determined to do the thing that was in my best interest. He did not allow the things that I had done to stop Him from meeting my need.

OK. That is how **I was loved**.

Now I have no right to do anything **other** than what Christ did. As Christians we are to take the position that what **Christ did to me** has more relevance in this situation than anything else. What **Christ did for me** supersedes my emotions, my sense of injustice, my hurt for being disregarded or being unconsidered.

Frankly I think this is **brutally hard to do**. And that is partly true because we often **feel** more strongly than we **think**. And we **react** more easily than we **submit**. Flesh **shouts** how we must respond. The Spirit **whispers** what the Word of God says.

And to make it even harder, all the imagined offenses could be true. A person may be doing things in order to hurt us, and maybe they can't even see it about themselves. They may be doing things that are obvious to everyone but themselves. That could be true. But wasn't that **also true of us** when Christ loved us?

Do you want to practice serious spirituality in your life? Were you looking for a way that you could **grow** in the Christian life? Were you singing "Create in me a clean heart", as Angie says. Have you been praying that God would teach you how to glorify Christ better. Well, try applying this. It is likely to keep you busy.

Our instinct is to look at what is wrong with the **other person** and blame what **I feel** on the **other person**. If they would only straighten up, then I would not feel this way. If only they... and we list our grievances, than I would

be just fine. The problem is them. I feel hurt, angry, rejected, offended, etc, because there is something wrong with **that person**. That is the fuel that drives us naturally.

But that is not the scriptural response. Our response is to say, I was in need. And I deserved to be damned forever. It was all my fault. And I didn't care. But Christ did not reject me. He did not give me what I deserved. He loved me. He met my need.

Now I must respond in kind. I have a heavenly **ought**.

Most of us were raised with a bunch of oughts. I ought to brush my teeth. I ought to smile at people who smile at me. I ought to wear deodorant. And part of the Christian life is figuring out where the oughts **came from** and how important they are.

This **ought** is a 10 on a scale of 1 to 10 in importance.

I **ought** to love you because **Christ loved me**.

You **ought** to love me because **Christ loved you**.

This is a **super** ought.

Can you see how hard this might be in real day to day life? Can you see what a struggle that might be? What a great adventure this Christian life is. It is always challenging us to **do the impossible** so we will depend upon Christ in our lives, so we will abide in Him because we know we **must**.

Here is the real challenge. The real challenge is not in the people God has surrounded us with. No. The real challenge is in **us**.

Flesh is naturally self-centered, self-asserting, self conceited, self indulgent, self pleasing, self seeking, self pitying, self sensitive, self defensive, self sufficient, self conscious, self righteous, and self glorifying.

Can any of us look at ourselves and say that this does not come out of us when we are **reacting** to something that **deeply troubles us**? Is this not always the battle. **You** are not the problem with me. **I am**.

John Bunyan understood the proper mentality. He said that

He that is down need fear no fall.

He that is low, no pride.

What he was saying is that when I see myself as I truly am, nobody can insult me and flair up my pride. They can never say something about me that is as bad as what **I know I am**. We end up thinking, "I am glad they do not know the whole truth about me." Humility is not something we reach by thinking **less** of our ourselves, it is what we attain by believing **the truth** about ourselves.

If we are blaming our problems on someone else, we are wasting our time.

That is not the path to fixing what is wrong with us. What is wrong with us

began with Eve's bite of the fruit. I think we always strive to be the hero in our own stories and we are always disappointed to find out that we aren't. If there is anything good, we find **someone else's** fingerprints. Sure it is true we have done some good things, maybe amazing things. If we are believers that has to be true of us. And that is worthy of notice and thanks. But when we look at where it **came from** we find that it all came from **Christ's work in our lives**.

The solution to our problem is not positive thinking about ourselves. It is positive thinking **about Christ** and what **He is doing** in our lives. There is lots of good stuff to think about. And it all originates in God. We find it true in our own lives **not that we loved God, but that He loved us**

I don't know all of your real life situations. There are those things that you **talk about** and those things that you **do not**, even with your best friends. But odds are there are things that other believers do, and the **closer** they are to you, the **more** this is true. And they upset you, or anger you, or in reaction to them you feel very strong feelings.

OK That is the testing ground. That is the spot we are talking about. That is your **love opportunity**.

Now, what would happen this week if we were to very intentionally choose to **believe what God says**? What would happen this week if when we saw the dam about to break, when we saw the words about to explode, when we saw our emotional reaction about to trigger in self pity, or explosive anger, or sarcasm, or self righteousness because of the **inferiority** of the person God **put in our path**, suppose we were to **stop right there**. And suppose we were to say- I was worse. When God loved me, I was worse. And it is true. No one ever deserved **better from us than Christ** and every sin we committed was a completely undeserved offense **against** Him. No one has sinned against us worse than we have sinned against Christ.

Suppose we stop and say, I was **worse** and **Christ loved me**. I now have zero right to **respond** to this fellow believer in the **flesh**. I cannot allow flesh to determine what I do or say or think. And flesh will be right there saying, "oh yes you can. You must. You always have. You can't stop it. You have got to respond this way. Look how strongly you feel. Look at what they did to. Let your **feelings tell you what to do**. Not God's Word. Surely you cannot respond otherwise." That is the kind of things your flesh will say.

Suppose we are to say to those thoughts, "Devil you are a liar, and you have always been a liar, and you will always be a liar, and I do not believe you. God's word is true. And God's word has given me a Holy ought. And I cannot deny Him."

Suppose we were to do that? That is probably not a new thing, but a thing we need continually reminded of.

Can we **imagine** what this would look like in our day to day interactions? Maybe that is the first step. **Visualize** what obedience would look like in those situations where we have often failed.

Now imagine asking, at this very point of frequent failure, what does this person **need** who I am speaking to? What will best meet this person's need I am dealing with? What will best foster their spiritual growth?

Now I am not trying to say that there is no room for harsh truths. I am not saying there is never room for anger. Scriptures are always our guide. We can look at how **Christ** and the **apostles** dealt with difficult people and we will see it did not always look or feel nice. Loving people is not simple. Determining what a person's needs are, and then meeting that person's needs can be complicated. Sometimes we need an arm around our shoulder. Sometimes we need a boot in the butt. Sometimes we need kindness. Sometimes we require a harsh rebuke. Some people are more intuitive about those things than others. But the response must be determined by **controlled love**. I think often love will drive us to have uncomfortable conversations. Love will drive us to say things we are not comfortable saying. Sometimes it drives us to conflict. Sometimes it drives us to resolution. Sometimes it drives to heartfelt affirmation that can turn the corner for a person. Even good marriages do not always involve **out and out fights**, but they **always** involve honest conversations that are difficult to have. Walking in the light is not for sissies. Love does not mean that we allow believers to avoid obeying those things that scripture clearly instructs. Enabling a fellow believer to live disobediently is not love, it is our disobedience often fueled by fear or cowardice or pride. So we are not talking about accepting all the behavior of a fellow believer with a mentality of moral superiority. But we are talking about responding in a way that asks first, **what is the right thing to do?** What is the **best thing for this other person**, no matter what my feelings are telling me to do? And that is dramatically different than what flesh will do.

I am ending early. And I am ending early because I do not want to add a single other thing. I would like us this week, in those relationships closest to us, to try to apply this Word of God. See what difference it makes. I really think the Lord wanted us to grapple with this this morning. And I pray that He works it into all of our lives more deeply this week.