

THE BOOK OF 1 JOHN

Lesson Seven

Loving the Way God Loves

“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loves is born of God, and knows God. He that loves not knows not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwells in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God has to us. God is love; and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear: because fear has torment. He that fears is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loves God loves his brother also.

“Whosoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loves him that begat loves him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcomes the world: and this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.” – 1

John 4:7 - 5:4

So far John has presented two rounds of tests designed to identify a true Christian. He has twice presented the three tests in order. First, the test of obedience (2:3-6; 2:28 - 3:10). Second, the test of love (2:7-11; 3:11-18). Third, the test of doctrine or belief (2:18-27; 4:1-6). In each new presentation, he has both expanded and deepened the understanding of the tests. Along with the tests, he has called for his readers to apply these

truths to their lives. In doing so, he has exposed the false teachers, who have left the church, as being counterfeit Christians.

He is now ready to present the third round or spiral of tests, only this time the order is changed. Instead of beginning with the test of obedience, he turns again to the test of love in 4:7-11. In 4:12-21 he combines the tests of love and doctrine. Then in 5:1-21 he weaves all three tests together.

Love's Source - vs. 7, 8

“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loves is born of God, and knows God. He that loves not knows not God; for God is love.”

John begins his discourse by giving an appeal to his readers to love one another, namely, the brethren. Why should Christians exhibit such love? Because the kind of love being discussed finds its origin in God and comes only from God. ***“Love is (comes) from God.”*** (v. 7). If God is the source of real love, then all who manifest love in their lives must have first received it from God. It is not an innate virtue in us, nor is it a learned behavior. It is acquired from our being ***“born of God”*** and reveals that we have come to ***“know God”*** in an intimate relationship.

The opposite is also true. Whoever does not find a love for Christian brethren does not know God. Why is this the case? Because God in His very nature is love. If God be loving in His very nature, our failure to love can only mean that we have no true knowledge of God; that we have not been born of Him, and that we do not have His nature. He is love, His nature is loving and love can never be absent from His being, or any of His actions. When John says that God is love, it is not to be taken that love is a complete description of God. John has also described God as light (1:5), and God as righteous (2:29). In John's Gospel, it is recorded that God is a Spirit (4:24). Thus, it has been correctly said that ***“love does not define God, but God defines love.”***

If we are to love as God loves, then how does God love? God loves in deed and not in word only. God's love is explained by what God did. He ***“sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him . . . and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”*** Here we are given two factors that define the nature of God's love. One, it is a self-sacrificing love. It cost God His most prized possession, His only begotten Son. The expression ***“only begotten”*** means ***“unique, one of a kind.”*** It describes the unity and relationship that are shared by the Father and the Son. The fact that God sent His Son into the world is one evidence of the deity of Jesus Christ. Christ was the pre-existent Son, He did not become His Son at His birth. Babies are not sent into

the world, they are born into the world. As the perfect man, Jesus was born into the world, but as the eternal Son, He was sent into the world.

The second factor that defines God's love is that it was an action done for the benefit of others. He became the propitiation for our sins. The Greeks understand the word "propitiation" to mean "to please the gods, to obtain their favor and good will." In most of the world's religions there exists within the hearts of all people a feeling of guilt over the awareness of sin. Their sin has brought about the wrath and displeasure of the deities involved. The deity or god can become favorable toward them through human deeds and offerings.

In the Biblical sense, it is God not man who provides the offering of propitiation. To propitiate God is to avert His wrath and find His favor. This can only take place through the substitutionary punishment of a sacrifice. The atonement, or covering, is effected when an innocent life is given in exchange for a guilty life. As a consequence of the sacrifice, the guilty party is freed from guilt since payment has been made to God by the offering. How can God forgive sinners and be consistent with His holy nature? In the cross of Jesus Christ. Jesus bore the punishment for sin and met the demands of God's holy law. But there in that cross, God reveals His love and makes it justly possible for men to be forgiven by grace through faith. So it is not man's love for God that initiates the reconciliation, but it is God's love for man as seen in the giving of His Son as an offering for sin.

Love's Obligation - v. 11

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

John understood that Christian love can be given to God only when it has first been received from God. Also it is God's love for us that defines what true love requires; which is the willing commitment to sacrifice one's most prized possession for the gain of another. This is how we ought to love our brethren. The word, "ought" is a strong word describing a moral obligation. We ought to love others not in the sense that we should do it, but that in light of Christ's sacrifice we are bound and obligated to love others in the same way. (cf. 2:6; 3:16).

Love's Indwelling - vs. 12-16

"No man has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwells in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the

world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God has to us. God is love; and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him.”

At this point, John inserts the well-known fact that God is invisible, and that no one has ever seen His essence. The abrupt shift in thought has puzzled many Bible students. But it actually sets the stage for a discussion of the way in which God may actually be known. Most Bible commentators believe that John is referring to the false teachers and their claims to have seen God in special visions that imparted a special knowledge, which others did not possess. John denies this is the way that God is known. Rather than revealing Himself to a select few, God reveals Himself to those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and show their faith by loving others with the sacrificial love with which they were loved.

How then can a person know that the invisible God is present in his life? John answers, ***“He has given us of His Spirit.”*** (v. 13). But since the Spirit is also invisible, how can we know that He dwells within us? Paul would answer in Galatians 5:22 that the proof of the Spirit’s indwelling is seen in the fruit of the Spirit, and the first manifestation of the Spirit’s fruit is “love”. In Hebrews 11:27 it is said that by faith Moses saw ***“Him who is invisible.”*** How shall men know that the invisible God is present in their lives? Jesus answers in these words, ***“By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another.”*** (John 13:35). The world will not believe that the invisible God loves sinners until they can see His love in sending His Son to die for them, and in seeing His love at work in the lives of His children. Sacrificial love, in giving ourselves to the needs of others, is the evidence of God’s indwelling presence in our lives, and of our dwelling in Him. (v. 13).

While the word “trinity” is never used in the Bible, the concept is there. It seems quite clear that John accepted this doctrine and understood it well enough to feel he did not need to explain it. In verses 13, 14 we have the Father sending or giving both the Son, and the Spirit.

Love’s Perfecting - vs. 17-21

“Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear: because fear has torment. He that fears is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loves God loves his brother also.”

John has now defined authentic Christian love as being self-giving in contrast to self-receiving. It looks out to the interests of others as opposed to one's self-interest. John affirmed in verse 12 that when a person understands this in a saving way, God dwells in him and God's love is perfected in him. The idea of God's indwelling in the believer was expanded in verses 13-16. Now in verses 17-21, John elaborates on the idea of perfected love. Previously it was God's love that was perfected in us, now it is our love that is perfected. (v. 17).

The word for "made perfect" describes that "which is complete or fully developed, that which has reached its intended goal." The mutual indwelling of God and the believer in verse 16 is the means for God's love to reach a state of completion. When the believer loves as God loves, his love has been perfected or made complete. In other words, he is now loving others as God loves him!

In His famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught that His disciples' love was to extend even to their enemies who opposed them. In doing so, He described the level of love that operates in the lives of lost men. In Matthew 5:46-48 He said, **"For if you love them which love you, what reward have you? Do not even the publicans (tax collectors) the same? And if you salute (greet) your brethren only, what do you more than others? Be you therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."**

When God generated life into Adam, He gave him the capacity to love on the divine level of God; which acts in a self-giving mode. When Adam fell into sin, he became self-centered and lost his God-given ability to love. Now he and his descendants can love only on a human level; which acts in a receiving mode. It can only give if it knows it can expect to receive something in return. Thus it can only love when it knows it will be loved in return.

One of God's goals in regenerating human beings is to restore that divine level of love in the new creatures to enable them both to understand and practice the love with which Jesus loves. Since this is God's goal for the believer, the believer is to desire and seek after the completion of God's goal for him. So when Jesus said to **"be perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect,"** he was saying, love others in the mode of self-giving as God Himself loves. This capacity is imparted to the believer in the new birth and is enlarged as the believer grows in the grace and knowledge of Christ, and is changed from one degree of glory into another.

John lists two benefits that occur when God's love is perfected in us. One, perfect love, (self-giving love) dispels fear of punishment in the day of judgment (vs. 17, 18). Two, perfect love dispels hatred of Christians (vs. 19-21).

Since the believer now living in this present world is already loving as Christ is loving, the believer is in the same position as Christ is before His Father. He is God's son and the object of His love! Think of it, ***"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God."*** (3:1). Sons do not need to be tormented by fear of punishment or condemnation by their father. Fear and love cannot co-exist. This is why a person, who stands in a love relationship with God, can look with confidence toward the day of judgment without fear and torment. Punishment is the portion of those who through their disobedience are condemned already (John 3:18). All such torment or punishment is dispelled by the perfect love in which the members of God's family lives.

The second benefit from perfected love is the dispelling of hatred toward Christians. The world hates God, His Christ, and His people. The world does not love the Christian, nor his way of living. The believer is now enabled to love because he understands that God first loved him. So Christian love is defined, not on a human level of self-receiving, but on a divine level of self-giving (v. 19). In taking the initiative in loving us, God not only showed us how to love one another (3:11), but He imparted the desire and the power to follow His example.

John now takes another jab at his opponents. For the fourth time, he calls them liars (1:10; 2:4, 22, 4:20). He will do so again in 5:10. They claimed to have seen God (4:12) and to love God (4:20), but this knowledge that they had acquired was for purposes of self-gratification only. It separated them from the brethren, the true believers. One cannot be loving an invisible God while hating a visible brother. Love for God and love for one's brother in Christ go together.

The Unity of the Three Tests - 5:1-4

"Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loves him that begat loves him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcomes the world: and this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith."

In Chapter 5, John starts concluding his discussion of the three tests of authentic or true Christianity. He does so by affirming that it is necessary for the believer to manifest all three signs of the presence of true Christianity; namely, right belief for the doctrinal or faith test, right love for the social test, and right actions for the moral obedience test. He now shows how these three tests are closely related and interwoven into an essential unity. He concentrates on the three essential ingredients that comprise a saving knowledge of God in eternal life. They are in proper order - faith, love and obedience. All three must be present to comprise a true Christian.

In verse 1, he begins by affirming that everybody who holds the true confession of faith about Jesus has been born of God. Faith is thus the sign or evidence of the new birth and not the means of the new birth as Arminian or free will theology teaches. The tenses of the Greek action verbs affirm this. "Believes" is present tense, signifying a present and ongoing belief. "Is born" is perfect tense, meaning "has been born in the past and the results are remaining." Ongoing faith is the result of the new birth, and not the cause or means of it. How then does one know if they have been born again or not? Not by looking for some religious experience. We can know it has happened when we begin to realize that we believe that Jesus is the Christ sent into the world to be our Savior. Thus we do not believe in order to be born of God, but we are begotten by God in order to enable us to believe!

This should not surprise us, in that our ability to love others is also an evidence of the new birth. John has affirmed this back in 4:7 where he said **"everyone that loves is born of God."** I have never met a Christian who has asserted that one must love others in order to be born again. No, it is generally agreed that love is the fruit of the spirit not the prerequisite for the Spirit -- likewise with faith.

Again, John has taught that doing what is right indicates that a person has been born of God. In 2:29 he said, **"everyone that does righteousness is born of him."** Does any Christian teach that if a sinner will start living right, then God will regenerate him? No, of course not. Also in 3:9, John says that **"whoever is born of God does not commit sin."** Is John saying that when a person ceases to practice sin, then God will grant him spiritual life? I think not. Even now in the present section, John has stated in 5:4, **"Whosoever is born of God overcomes the world."** Is God saying to men dead in trespasses and sins that if you will do your part and overcome your love of the world, then I will do my part and give you spiritual life? To ask these questions is to answer them. All these are evidences of God's activity in working in us these actions that are traceable to the new birth.

The new birth that brings about our believing, also brings about our loving. As a child loves his father, he loves the children whom his father begets. Anyone who loves God must also love God's children. Just as faith and love are related, so love and obedience are likewise related. They are so closely related that obedience defines love. John says in verse 3, **"This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments."** The connection between love for God and obedience serves as a protection against thinking of love for God as "emotional feelings" about God. True love acts to obey God's commands. When true love is acting, God's commands are not burdensome. When God enters into our lives at the point of the new birth, He sheds His love abroad in our hearts. When we believe on the name of God's Son, then His yoke becomes easy and his burden light. (Matthew 11:30). Living the life of faith and love becomes our delight, and we discover the freedom and liberty for which we had been seeking.

If love for God is expressed in keeping God's commandments, how then, can the believer keep God's commandments? In verse 4, John traces this ability to obey God to its origin in the new birth. There is an overcoming, conquering power in regenerating grace. It imparts a faith which looks to Christ for the victory. John's readers had overcome the power of the false prophets (4:4). They had also overcome the love of Satan's world system (2:13-17). They had been translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son.

Some Christians see their trials and temptations as indicating that their victory is incomplete. This is not an accurate assessment. Paul would say in Romans 8:36, 37, **"As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."** Faith does not exempt us from the struggles or their pain, but it assures us of a certain outcome of victory. When facing the cross, Jesus could say, **"In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."** (John 16:33).

John's argument has now gone full circle. All of the three tests are related to each other. As a result of God's begetting activity all true Christians have a correct view of who Jesus is. They love both the Father and His children and keep His commands. They are enabled to keep His commands because they overcome the world. Their victory over the world is due to their faith in their Lord who has already won the battle. Faith, love and obedience are the three evidences of salvation. Remove any of these evidences and one fails the tests. True believers will see evidence to some degree of each of these in their lives, and will confidently look forward in hope for the perfection of each of these in their lives to come, after their lives in this world are over. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world!