

Love At Work In Us

I John 4:13-21

Last week we looked at John's words of encouragement to tap into the source of love. We saw that the world has a distorted view of what love is, and that view may have even been modeled to us either by our parents, our family, our friends, or even those we come in contact with on a consistent basis.

True love is merciful and not conditional. It looks past image, wealth, religious pride, and age, and accepts an individual simply because God loves the whole world. Love is also consistent, not fluctuating from time to time or based on met expectations. It is always available. In order to become lovers of God and people we must learn from God what true love is.

May we understand just how incredible and indescribable God's love really is. How it reaches out to all, how it is available to all from past eternity to the future eternity. How indiscriminant it is of people, and how it is able to reach even the worst of sinners and bring them into the presence of God.

Real love allows people to respond out of their hearts and not based on obligation. It releases people from responding because someone wants them to, to responding because they want to. This can be said about the Christian faith. Do you realize how many people respond to God because of obligation, as opposed to responding to him in love?

But John continued on and told us that since we have been shown mercy, so we must also do the same. We must be willing to give up our right to judge or criticize, to look past each others faults no matter what they may be, and still show kindness.

It is only when we understand and model true love that then we become full expressions of God's love. When people look at us, what do they see? Is it the love of God or the distorted love of mankind?

This morning John continues on in **I John 4:13-21** and brings even more emphasis to this topic of love.

¹³And God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us. ¹⁴Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵All who proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God. ¹⁶We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in him. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. ¹⁷And as we live in God, our love grows more perfectly. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgement, but we can face him with confidence because we are like Christ here in this world. ¹⁸Such love has no fear because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of judgement, and this shows that his love has not been perfected in us. ¹⁹We

love each other as a result of his loving us first. ²⁰If someone says, "I love God," but hates another Christian, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we have not seen? ²¹And God himself has commanded that we must love not only him but our Christian brothers and sisters, too.

1. The Holy Spirit gives us the ability to live in Jesus Christ. (vs.13)

Why do we need the Holy Spirit? Because we are incapable to being godly by our own effort. Our actions may look good, but the heart and the motivation always tend to focus back on us. Have you ever given a gift or given of your time and yet felt offended or unappreciated because the individuals that you gave to didn't respond to you the way you thought they should have? Or have you ever given a word of encouragement and wished that someone would do the same for yourself? Somehow, our actions in our own human effort are not satisfied by simple acts of love, but require something in return.

I think at times our expectations of what we should receive in return becomes more of a focal point as opposed to the actual act of helping someone out.

We need the Spirit of God to keep us in check, to love on us so that we don't have to have something in return for our good deeds. In **Galatians 5:22-23** we read:

But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. Here there is no conflict with the law.

The presence of the Holy Spirit gives us an alternative from our natural human response. It gives us the ability or insight to respond in purity and in godliness.

We put so many conditions on our loving other people. In fact, we tend to always love those who love us, or those who share the same viewpoints that we have. But with pure and true love we will see the acceptance of people simply because they are another individual who has been created by God, regardless of their dress, their social status, their skin color, or their opinions. We need the Holy Spirit in order to love with the pure and true love of God.

Chuck Swindoll tells a story of a man who fell in love with an opera singer. This guy was in love although he hardly knew her, since his only view of the singer was through binoculars – from the third balcony. But he was convinced he could live "Happily ever after" married to a voice like that. He scarcely noticed she was considerably older than he was, nor did he care that she walked with a limp. Her mezzo-soprano voice would take them through whatever might come. After a whirlwind romance and a hurry-up ceremony, they were off to their honeymoon together. She began to prepare for their first night together. As he watched, his chin dropped to his chest. She pluck out her glass eye and plopped it into a container on the nightstand. She pulled off her wig, ripped off her false eyelashes,

yanked out her dentures, unstrapped her artificial leg, and smiled at him as she slipped off her glasses that hid her hearing aids. Stunned and horrified, he gasped, "For goodness sake, woman, sing, sing, sing!"

We tend to love things that are pleasing to eye, or an image that inspires us, or a façade of perfection. That is why we need the Spirit of God to teach us, and guide us into true Christian love, modeled to us by Jesus Christ.

John continues on in verse 14 and tells us that the apostles have seen Jesus with their own eyes and now they can testify, or as the Greek can be translated, are witnesses that Jesus is the Savior of the world.

2. The Holy Spirit gives us the ability to learn from Jesus Christ.(vs.15)

John and the disciples saw Jesus with their own eyes. They witnessed his teaching, his predictions, his death and resurrection. They learned from him first-hand. But what about us today? What do we have? Well, John continues on in verse 15 and tells us that all who proclaim show that they have God living in them.

The term proclaim here is translated in the Greek to mean "to confess, or to acknowledge a promise, covenant or agreement". In other words, those who commit themselves to God and have made a promise or agreement to see Jesus as their Savior, show that God is living in them by the power of the Holy Spirit.

No, we haven't learned things first-hand like the Apostles but we have the Holy Spirit who gives us the ability to be a witness of the work of Jesus and the power of his sacrifice. No, we haven't heard the teachings of Jesus first-hand but with the Scriptures of the Bible and the insight of the Holy Spirit we can live as one who has heard from Jesus himself. In fact the scripture tells us that the Holy Spirit will simply tell us what he has heard from Jesus himself.

John continues on in verse 16 and now tells us that not only does the Holy Spirit give us the ability to understand how much God loves us, but now...

3. The Holy Spirit gives us the ability to love as God loves. (vs.16-17)

The term "those who live in love live in God" can also be translated as "those who live in love live like God would live." We have the ability to no longer model our own desires or character, but allow the Holy Spirit rulership in our lives, telling us what we should and should not do, how we should reach out, and how we need to hold our tongues at times.

Verse 17 tells us that as we strive to live similar in character to Jesus Christ, our love grows more perfect. The Greek for the word perfect here means to be complete, to accomplish its task, to be fulfilled or full. It is love that is lived out or fulfilled. Jesus

talked of the final judgement in **Matthew 25:31-46**. Jesus judges the world and divides the sheep from the goats. And he tells the sheep in verse 34-36:

Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.

The sheep then reply, “when did we do these things?” And Jesus told them that they were ministering to him when they reached out to people.

When we reach out to people in love, we are not only ministering to them but to God as well. When people are asking for help, God is asking for help. Our response to people is a response to him.

John continues on in I John 4:17 and says that we can have confidence because we are like Christ here in this world. The truth is that if God looks at our lives and sees the activity of himself in us, he will not deny himself at the day of judgement. When he can see himself in us he will embrace us as his own. Then we can have confidence of boldness in his presence. The same boldness mentioned in **I John 3:21**:

Dear friends, if our conscience is clear, we can come to God with bold confidence.

*And now, dear children, continue to live in fellowship with Christ so that when he returns, you will be full of courage and not shrink back from him in shame. **I John 2:28***

We are talking about boldness that compels us into the very presence of God with expectancy and excitement, not with regret and disappointment. John tells that we will not be afraid of the day of judgement.

4. Active Love Eliminates Fear of God’s Judgement

John continues on in I John 4:18 and tells us that godly love has no fear because perfect love expels all fear. The word expel here is defined as to violently throw, send or cast out. The word fear comes from the Greek word Phobo (Phobia) which means to be fearful, to be alarmed, or to be terrified.

John is telling us here that the godly demonstration of love within our own lives can put to rest the fear, alarm or terror that could come with the idea of the day of judgement.

It is interesting that fear is the opposite of boldness. If we allow God to live in us and then to be modeled in love through action towards our fellow man, we can have confidence that God will receive us at the Day of Judgement. **Romans 8:15** says:

So you should not be like cowering, fearful slaves. You should behave instead like God's very own children, adopted into his family – calling him "Father, dear Father."

This all goes back to our study of **I John 3:21-24** when we talked about having confidence in God. May we be able to experience **Romans 8:38-39**:

And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can't, and life can't. The angels can't, and the demons can't. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away. Whether we are high above the sky or in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Love that is pure in nature and aimed at those in need and those around us shows that we have the Spirit of God living in us. And when we have the Spirit of God living in us we can have boldness or confidence that God will know us and see our good deeds and will give us our due reward.

Fear has a way of limiting us. It brings with it anxieties, worries, and even apathy. But we don't have to live with these limitations. God wants us to have the assurance that we will be accepted by him.

Isn't it true that we always tend to fear those who we don't know? We don't know where we stand with them, or what they think of us, or whether or not they like us. It is only when one side or the other begins to reach out in unconditional love that fear can be forced out of the picture bringing honesty, truth, and understanding into the situation. And when there is honesty, truth and understanding there tends to be more freedom in the relationship. And when there is freedom in the relationship there tends to be more boldness in confidence in that relationship.

A godly and active love casts out fear of man and fear of God.

5. We must love because we have been loved.(vs.19-21)

John continues on in **I John 4:19** and tells us that we love simply because we have been loved by God. Our love for people is a result of us being loved. We can't give away something that we haven't experienced ourselves. **Colossians 3:12** tells us:

Since God chose you to be the holy people who he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Because we have been shown love by God we must then love. John continues on verse **20-21** and tells us love for God and people go hand in hand. God is telling us here that it

is possible to love people, even the ones we don't think we ever can. Who said it was going to be easy. Jesus said in **Matthew 5:43-44**:

"You have heard that the law of Moses says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!"

Love is going to take time and effort for some of us if not all of us. But I pray that we will not only be willing to love each other, but that we would allow God to come, by the power of his Spirit, and help us to love each other.

Conclusion

So, John is telling us this morning that the Holy Spirit is who gives us the ability to live in Jesus Christ. We are incapable in our own human effort to live godly lives. As human beings we always expect something in return for any effort of love towards someone else. We put conditions on people, or we even tend to love people with whom we have something in common. But in order get away from our own selfish desires we need the Holy Spirit to help us.

We also saw that the Holy Spirit also give us the ability to learn from Jesus. Even though we haven't seen Jesus with our own eyes or heard his audible voice, we can still learn from him. We can now be witnesses for Jesus Christ because of what he has done in our own lives.

We also saw that the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to love as God loves. Just as we need the Holy Spirit to help us live godly lives, so we also need his help to love people. The Holy Spirit can bring direction to us to tell us how to show love. In fact the Holy Spirit will draw us to God's will. And as we love people we need to understand that God views it as if we are loving Him. A person in need is now seen as God in need.

We also saw this morning that active love eliminates any fear of judgement. Love that is seen and is active can give us confidence in the fact that God sees what we are doing, and he sees the similarities that we have with him, and will be sure to bless his own character within us.

And finally, we saw that we can't hold onto the love that God has given us for ourselves, but that true Christian love must be given away. We love simply because we have been loved by God.