

February 10, 2019

“Loving One Another”
1 John 4:7-12

FCF: Our confusion about love

PROPOSITION: (anchor) The Lord has made clear what marks His disciples.
(magnet) And one of those is our love for one another.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

One of the deeper questions of our time is “Why do we love?” Some say, “It’s chemistry. It’s a product of evolution, an impulse necessary to propagate the species.” You may find that satisfactory. But try telling that to a newlywed couple or new parents holding their infant child.

The Bible’s answer as to why we love is that we are made in the image and according to the likeness of the God who loves. Which means that to love is an essential part of being human.

But that opens up some other questions. Not just “Why do we love?” but “Why should we love?” and “How can we love?” and “What does it even mean to love?” All good questions.

SCRIPTURE READING: 1 John 4:7-12

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

In case you missed it, Super Bowl LIII was last week. The attendance at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta was just over 70,000. Here’s a thought experiment. Let’s say you were there. Someone sprung you a cheap ticket for \$2500 and you’re sitting in the nosebleed seats. How would you know which side the folks around you were on? How would you be able to tell who they were rooting for? You’d look at their outfits, whose colors they were sporting. When are they cheering? As the game progresses, what is their mood? Those would be the marks.

How would you identify a true follower of Jesus? What are the marks of His disciples? That is one of the chief concerns of the Apostle John in this letter. Last week, we were looking at John’s Gospel and considering the wondrous reality of God’s love for us. This week, as a follow up to that, we are looking at this letter and considering the necessity of our love for one another.

Why is that important? The Lord has made clear what marks His disciples. Think of that. We aren’t left to guess. He’s told us. And one of those marks is our love for one another.

So this is something of importance. And this text tells us some things about this mark. First, the pattern of love. Second, the purpose for love. And, third, the power to love. Each of those are here and tell us about this critical mark of Christ’s disciples - our love for one another.

I. THE PATTERN OF LOVE

First, the pattern of love. What does it look like? (**READ 1 John 4:9-10**).

A) Truly Concrete

What do we see here? For starters, it’s obvious that such love is truly concrete.

1. Not limited to feeling

It is not limited to feeling. This is as far as much modern thought goes and we see it in our films, literature, and song lyrics. But this is not just a feeling. That is far too unstable and unreliable.

2. But expressed in action

This is love expressed in action. It is “made manifest.” It shows and reveals itself. John has already touched on this (READ 1 John 2:9-11; 3:16-18). This love is expressed in action.

B) At a Cost

And it also comes at a cost. We bear the burden of another by taking it upon ourselves.

1. A giving of life

There is a giving of life in such love (READ 1 John 4:9). John says Jesus is the means of our life. That’s the pattern. Such love is redemptive, restorative. There is something of a rescue.

2. The losing of life

There is a giving of life. At a cost. There is a giving and a losing (READ 1 John 4:10). Jesus’ death is the means of our life. For God’s just wrath to be removed, it was poured out on Him.

This is the pattern of our love for one another - a love that is truly concrete and at a cost.

Illustration:

The Victoria Cross is Canada's highest military honor, similar to our Medal of Honor. These medals are awarded for acts of valor above and beyond the call of duty (READ quote):

The first Victoria Cross of World War II was awarded to Company Sergeant-Major John Robert Osborn. The sergeant-major and his men were cut off from their battalion and under heavy attack. When the enemy came close enough, the Canadian soldiers were subjected to a concentrated barrage of grenades. Several times Osborn protected his men by picking up live grenades and throwing them back, but eventually one fell in just the wrong position to pick up in time. With only a split second to decide, Osborn shouted a warning and threw himself on top of the grenade. It exploded, killing him instantly. The rest of his company survived that battle because of Osborn's selfless other-centeredness.

Application:

We are called to do that every day. “How?” you ask. As parents comfort a sick child late at night for the third night in a row. As we take time to listen to the pain of a friend even in the midst of our own struggles. As we volunteer in the nursery so that young mom whose husband is deployed can participate in the worship service. As we ask how we can adjust our giving to the needs of the church. Or as one sibling lets their brother or sister have that one last donut.

Those are all concrete and costly. That is to give life to another by a dying to ourselves. The Lord has made clear what marks His disciples. And one of those is our love for one another.

II. THE PURPOSE TO LOVE

But what is the purpose of love? What does the Lord have in mind for us in this?

A) As a Consequence

At least a couple of things. The first is that it is a consequence (READ 1 John 4:11).

1. Not a precondition

Our love is a consequence. By that, I mean that it is not a precondition of God’s love for us. His love for us hinges only on His grace. He is not waiting to see what we’ll do before He loves us.

2. But a reflection

Our love for one another is not a precondition of His love toward us. It is a reflection of His love toward us. It is a response to His love. And it is the only proper right response to such love.

B) As an Assurance

But our love for one another also serves as an assurance. This may seem surprising.

1. For others

John speaks of this one way in his Gospel (**READ John 13:34-35**). What is Jesus saying? The watching world can know and be assured of our love for Him by our love for one another.

2. For us

But we can be assured of this as well (**READ 1 John 4:12, 7**). We are assured we are followers of Christ by our love for one another. If there is any impulse, desire, effort - however imperfect or incomplete. The invisible God makes Himself visible by such love. That can be a comfort.

This is part of the purpose of our love - as a consequence of His and an assurance of ours.

Illustration:

Not surprisingly, again we see how much greater the Lord's purposes are. Think of light pollution - when artificial light at night drowns out the natural light, when it's hard to see the stars. But on some clear nights, you can see there's so much more to see. So we stop and gaze.

Application:

The Lord has so much more in mind for us than we think when He commands us to love one another. It is not just to be nice but as a consequence of His love and an assurance of ours. Which makes this a matter of prayer. "Lord, may I know of your great love for me such that it would overflow into greater love for others. Help me to breathe it in that I might then breathe it out. And when I struggle to know who and whose I am, help me to see your work in my heart."

The Lord has shown the marks of His disciples. One of those is our love for one another.

III. THE POWER FOR LOVE

But how is this possible? The pattern and purpose of love take us finally to its power.

A) Embracing the News

And there are two stages to this. The first involves an initial embracing of the news.

1. Born of God

(**READ 1 John 4:7**) Part of what John is saying here is that to love in such ways assumes that we have been born again, that we have experienced that sovereign work of the Spirit in our hearts.

2. Believing the gospel

And, through that, we are then enabled and come to believe the gospel message. That is, through this new birth, we turn to, trust in, and fully rely upon the finished work of Christ for us.

B) Abiding in the Lord

So this power begins with an embracing. And continues through an abiding in the Lord.

1. His abiding in us

And this is a mutual abiding. Partly, His abiding in us (**READ 1 John 4:12**). Again, part of what John is saying is that the Lord's continual dwelling in us is vital to our loving one another.

2. Our abiding in Him

So there is His abiding in us. But there is also our abiding in Him (**READ 1 John 4:8**). Now let's think about this. To say "God is love" is not to say that is all He is or that "love is God." It is to say it is an essential characteristic. And that to know Him is to be impacted by this love.

In that alone is the power to love - the embracing of the news and the abiding in the Lord.

Illustration:

Biographers often speak of how certain individuals have a powerful and influential effect upon the people around them. You cannot help but be affected, impacted, transformed by their presence. That's true of men and women in history. How much more so with our greater God?

Application:

How can we come to experience the power to love? By coming to know the God of love. How do we come to know the God of love? As we do in any relationship. Time. We spend time with Him in His Word, asking Him to help us hear and respond. Time with His people, growing in community. Time here together in worship, not just private and personal but corporate and communal. Time out there in service, out of our comfort zones so as to see our need of Him.

This is about the marks. To experience the power to love, we must know the God of love.

CONCLUSION:

"Apologetics" is the discipline of defending the Christian faith, of giving reasoned and thoughtful responses to the questions of our age. It's really not optional. The Apostle Peter commands us to be ready to give an answer for the hope we profess. Which means we have to think through the questions of the problem of evil, the reliability of the Bible, the relationship of faith and science, and other such. We need to take such questions seriously and engage them.

But there is another concern here. And if it's not addressed, nothing else matters. "What could that be?" you ask. Love. Our love for one another. Some of you may have heard me say this before. Francis Schaeffer was one of the greatest apologists of the 20th century. Among his many books was a smaller one, The Mark of the Christian. In that little book - and I'd highly commend it to you - in that little book Schaeffer makes the case that love is the final apologetic. In the end, it actually matters more than anything else as we engage this dark and dying world.

"What about doctrine and orthodoxy?" you say. "Surely that's important." Of course it is. To call love the final apologetic is not to say none of that is important. It's just not sufficient. Think about it. How are we going to reach a culture that doesn't care about truth, that has no category for doctrine and orthodoxy? Only by a living demonstration of the reality of the gospel. By a love that is visible and costly. By the distinctly different ways we handle our differences.

We are to be light and life. Such love is the only way anyone will know. The only way. The Lord has made clear what marks His disciples. And one of those is our love for one another.

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