

October 22, 2017
Sunday Evening Service
Series: 1 John
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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KNOW GOD'S LOVE; SHOW GOD'S LOVE
1 John 4:7-12

Country/Rock singer Glen Campbell died a few days ago at the age of 81. Of the plethora of songs he published, a dozen of them were popular, well-known love songs. He seemed to relish singing about love. Unfortunately, Campbell never quite figured out how to do what he loved to sing about. He was married four times and involved in numerous infamous relationships, not the least of which was a tryst with country music singer Tanya Tucker who was 22 years his junior.

Also, Campbell's ongoing addictions to drugs and alcohol might indicate that he was having a hard time finding true love. It might indicate that he was no different than the hundreds of other media stars who actually love themselves so much they have no room to love others too. Isn't it strange that so many country and rock stars sing songs about love and even go on world tours to tell everyone that *What the World Needs Now is Love Sweet Love*. Dionne Warwick who recorded that famous song in 1966 grew up singing gospel music in the New Hope Baptist Church in Newark, New Jersey. She should know about love, right?

Oh, and Glen Campbell also claimed that he was a believer in and follower of Jesus Christ. Maybe he was, sort of. He was reared in the Church of Christ. After all his failures at love he finally met his fourth wife, Kimberly Woollen, on a blind date in 1981. They were married and by the time they got to Phoenix they joined a Baptist church.

It all kind of makes us wonder if everyone who claims to be a Christian is really a follower of Christ. Or if everyone who is talking

about love is even a believer in Christ at all. How do we know? How can we tell for sure?

In this text, John pointed out why love of fellow Christians is so important. It is not something we need to do just because Jesus said so. Rather, love for other Christians is a clear indication that God the Holy Spirit is living in our hearts. In other words, John would argue that singing about love is pointless for the Christian testimony. But, doing love for fellow Christians is a pretty clear indication of the resource and motivation for love.

Command to Love (vv.7-8).

The command, as it appears to be, is stated succinctly: *Beloved, let us love one another (v.7a)*. John addressed it to the recipients of love. We know that the beloved are people loved by God the Father. The beloved people are recipients of God's love through God the Son's sacrifice. The beloved are truly regenerated people. Therefore, beloved are loved by other regenerated people.

If one person is going to be loved, another person must love. Therefore, the command requires continuing practice of love. But before we go any further, we need to stop and consider the fact that this statement is not technically a command in that it is not stated as an imperative like most commands in the New Testament. The verb form here is a part of speech (the subjunctive) that can allow for doubt. That being true, we understand John to strongly recommend that we should be continually showing love to each other.

Why? What is the basis or reason for the strong admonition? The reason for the command is, *for love is from God (v.7b)*. That is simple enough to understand. What is not always simple to understand is, "What is love?" The problem is that human nature offers us a perverse view of love. According to modern use of the word, love is a warm feeling we have toward someone or something generated by some kind of perceived value in the object or person loved.

That isn't the kind of love that comes from God. God does not have warm feelings for people because we are lovely, loveable, or have some other worthiness that draws out those warm feelings. God has compassion on us because we are so utterly helpless. God shows

mercy to use because we are so pitiful. God's love for us is His conscience choice to do the very best for us (which is to provide eternal life) even though it cost Him an extreme sacrifice (the life blood of His unique, eternal Son).

Love has to be from God because God is the author and supplier of love. So John's argument: If you say you have a relationship with God, then you ought to reflect the character of God. And the character of God is love.

Look at the argument regarding association. Stated positively God's plan is that *whoever loves has been born of God and knows God (v.7c)*. The person who is characterized by practicing God-kind of love does so because he or she has already been born of God. This is a reference to the miracle of the new birth. It is an event in the past that has continuing ramifications in life. And because we have been regenerated by God's power, we are knowing God.

This is such a powerful statement connecting the way we think and the way we live with the reality of the new birth. George Barna and others frequently do surveys of professing Christians in America. Up to 75% claim to be Christians, but only 45% claim to be born again. Obviously, someone doesn't know what it means to be a Christian. It gets worse. Survey after survey reveals that a huge majority of the people who claim to be born again know precious little about the Bible. People who are not familiar with the Bible do not know God. Maybe this is why love for Christian brothers is a bit hard to find.

Stated negatively God warns that *anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love (v.8)*. This means that lack of knowing, experiencing, being intimate with God results in lack of brotherly love. That is only a logical conclusion because God is love. It is true that God reveals love. It is true that God is loving. It is true that we know what love is because of God's many demonstrations and manifestations. But people who really know God intimately through their growing relationship with Him, really understand love. The more and better we know God, the more and better we understand love.

Standard of Love (vv.9-10).

Having revealed that He is the source of love, God then revealed to John that He is the standard of love also. *In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him (v.9)*. We know what love is like because God manifested love. Why? God was not obligated to show us that He is love. God chose to make His love known to us. God chose to reveal to us in clear and certain ways what love really is.

How God chose to reveal the nature or standard of love is by sending the unique Son into the world. God the Son, unique in every way, eternal, and perfect, came to earth. We supposedly celebrate that grand event at Christmas and hardly anyone is impressed with the astonishing thing God did. John never got over the astonishing reality that God came to this earth in the Son so that we can know Him. So he began this letter: *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us – (1 John 1:1-2)*.

You can almost sense John's awe as he recalled living with, watching, observing, rubbing shoulders with God the Son. We don't have the amazing privilege. However, as we read the Bible record, we should not take for granted God's revelation of His love.

And as we learn about God and see His love revealed in the Bible, we should also experience the result of God's love is our life. John wrote that the Father sent the Son into the world that we might have life in Him. Of course, through faith in Christ we have eternal life. And through faith in Christ we have abundant life, life as God intended it to be.

But, also because of Christ we have the ability to live. Sometimes, so-called followers of Christ argue that it doesn't matter how they live. That is impossible if we have life through Christ. Life through Christ will of necessity look a lot like Christ. Sometimes followers of Christ argue that they cannot love other Christians. They claim they are just not made that way. But, life through Christ means

that He is our resource of spiritual life. If we the branches are attached to Christ the vine, we most certainly have all the resources necessary to love others.

But what does the loving kind of life look like? God illustrated the standard of love. *In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (v.10)*. The standard of love is God's choice. God doesn't love us back. God does not pay attention to us because we somehow gained His attention. God chooses to show us love. It is volitional on His part.

God proved love for us by paying for our sins. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit chose that the Son would come to earth to show love. The greatest expression of love was God the Son becoming the means that allows God to forgive our sins. Because God illustrated love through Christ, we who are loved by Christ should also illustrate His love.

Illustration of Love (vv.11-12).

Because God has illustrated His love to us, we know certain realities about God's love. First is the fact that God loves us so (v.11)! Notice that this wonderful promise is not addressed to sinners, the enemies of God, or the world in general. The argument is only applied to and useful to the objects of God's special redeeming love. We who are drawn by God to know and confess our sins and to plunge in faith depending upon Christ's sacrifice alone for salvation, understand the extent, the "So" of God's love. Because God's love is so immense, so amazing, the recipient of God's love should become unable to find words in human language to fully explain that love.

"Okay," John argues. "If you really know God and have really experienced God's love, then you ought to love." Because God loves us so, *we also ought to love one another (v.11)*. Literally the text states that we owe each other love. It is not just a good idea to love each other. Rather, because of what God has done for us, we owe the same to each other. When God tells us we ought to do something, it is more than a simple suggestion.

This is the point Jesus tried to get the Pharisees to see in the "Good Neighbor Story." Jesus didn't record the story in the Bible so

that we could say, "That was a nice thing for that Samaritan fellow to do." Jesus meant to tell us, "This is what love for a brother looks like." We who have received God's love through Jesus ought to be the first people to show the same kind of love for each other.

Okay, because God told us through John that we owe it to fellow Christians to love them, we will try to do that. Yes, but the most important reason why we should love each other is found in verse twelve. No one knows by nature what God is like or as John put it, *No one has ever seen God (v.12a)*.

It is true that some people in Bible history saw various manifestations of God. Moses saw a glimpse of God's glory. Joshua saw the Angel of the Lord, maybe a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. Noah and wife saw a similar manifestation of God. They were all convinced that they were on the verge of death and destruction for having that privilege.

And it is also true that God the Son in Jesus of Nazareth was the best picture of God. While no one has seen God the Father, God the Son was the best manifestation of God in human form so that mere mortals could see what God is like. It is as the writer to the Hebrews put it, *He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3)*. It is as John stated at the beginning of his Gospel: *No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known (John 1:18)*.

The apostles were privileged to gaze on the best illustration of God and, therefore, could study God through Him. John confessed, *That which was from the beginning, . . . , which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life (1 John 1:1)*.

So what did they see? They saw a miracle worker who could command the weather, multiply food, heal all manner of sickness, and even raise the dead. They saw a teacher who taught truth with supreme, supernatural authority. But most of all they saw love. They continually observed and studied love that patiently drew penitent sinners to Himself. They saw love that patiently taught the stubborn, self-centered, foolish disciples. They lived with love incarnate that stooped to wash the feet of the man who had already delivered Him

to the authorities; the love that warned and reasoned with proud Peter who would betray Him. They saw love that laid down His life for willful sinners who gladly replaced God, making themselves the authority. They watched that love that restored penitent Peter and used him for God's glory.

You have never seen God, but you have seen Jesus. He has drawn you to Himself when you preferred to run down a path of destruction. He chose you to be His child when you chose to reject Him as King. He has patiently taught me and slowly but surely showed me how much unlike Him I am. When He should have cast us aside as hopelessly proud and selfish, He continues to love us into conformity with Himself.

And if we who are the children of God are so unaware of what He is like, what can be said for those sinners who by nature reject Him out of hand? The sinner's sin separates him or her from God. There is such a wide chasm caused by sin that the sinner cannot even imagine God accurately. Sinners are able to stare directly at the work of God's hands, His self-revelation in nature and not only be unable to see God, but are unable to admit that it is God's revelation. Apart from the Son who declared and demonstrated God to us, no one but no one but no one has ever seen God.

Jesus isn't here and sinners don't read the Bible. How will they ever see God? Brotherly love is the picture of God. John drew his argument to a close by writing, *If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us (v.12b)*.

The greatest reason to love each other is because love for others proves that God is indwelling us. Love is like a window to our soul through which others see God on the inside. Specifically, John argued that loving others proves that God's love **has been perfected in us**. That phrase means that God's love has been brought to completion. The cycle has been completed. This is why brotherly love is so important in the Christian's life. It is not that you must love the brothers or else. Brotherly love is not a divine obligation. It is not that loving brothers will ingratiate you to God and thereby acquire His special blessing on your life.

Rather, brotherly love is the expected completion of the love cycle. God loves me, which leads God to pour out His love in me

through Christ, which means that God lives in me, which causes me to express love to others.

Notice that in John's first letter he lists three results of God's love being completed in us. Because of God's love being completed in us we are obedient. *But whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him (1 John 2:5)*. Because God's love is completed in us, we have no fear of God's judgment, but confidence. *By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love (1 John 4:17-18)*. And now as we have seen from this text, because God's love is completed in us, we love the brothers.

Last weekend I had the privilege of participating in Ben Vahle's ordination. The week before I arrived, the pastor of their church announced that I would need a place to stay. I ended up staying with a guy named Larry. Larry told me that when he heard the announcement of the need, he jumped at the chance to keep me. I was benefitted greatly to spend a few days with Larry. In brief, here is his testimony. He was a typical worldly person who lived in the world and like the world. He did drugs, got drunk, had sex, and broke the law—God's law and man's law. A couple of years ago, his brother told him about Christ, and Jesus was very merciful, saved Larry from his sins, and came to live in his heart. Last year at about this time, Larry's wife passed away after a lengthy sickness. Larry had no church and called Pastor Habaeger to do the funeral. As a result, Larry became a part of Holden Baptist Church. As I enjoyed fellowship with this child of God, I observed how different his life was now. Not being nosy, but observant, I noticed that his choice of music was not like the world anymore. The movies stacked on his shelves had been selected with care. The pictures around the house spoke of a changed life. There were several Bibles scattered around the house – one at the table where he had morning devotions and one on the coffee table where he was working through a study. Everything about Larry, he said, "Changed."

I have never seen God. But I know what God is like because of Larry. Because God's love was completed in him, he is obedient to

Christ. Because God's love was completed in him, he has no fear of future judgment. Because God's love was completed in him, he loved me and showed me hospitality.

According to John's argument in this text, if I am not loving fellow Christians, it is an indication of one of two things: 1) I am not born again and God is not abiding in me through the person of the Holy Spirit. That was the Apostle Paul's warning. *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him (Romans 8:9).* Or 2) I am born again and God does abide in me through the person of the Holy Spirit. But because I am sinning against God, I am quenching the influence of the Holy Spirit which grieves God deeply. That is a dangerous practice in light of God's warning not to do it. God told Christians through Paul, "*Do not quench the Spirit*" (1 Thessalonians 5:19). When we quench the Holy Spirit's ministry in our lives, we grieve God. *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30).*

That command not to grieve the Holy Spirit falls within the context of very practical instruction about brotherly love. We read, *Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you (Ephesians 4:29-32).*

Showing love to each other is very easy, very practical, and should be very common among us who are indwelt by God the Holy Spirit.