



SERIES: Authentic Christian Community/1 John, Wk. 3

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If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 John, Chapter 4.

We're going to pick it up in Verse 7:

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. (*NASB, 1 John 4:7-8)

John is dealing with a very specific problem — it's good to keep remembering this — with false teachers who are putting forth a counterfeit Christianity. They live unloving lives. They live immoral lives. There's simply no evidence of the truth doing anything in them. That's contrasted with what has radically changed within the hearts of those who have genuinely believed. Now this is the third time John has dealt with the topic of love. He kind of goes in these cycles, and each time he repeats some of what he said before, and then he expands on it. It's good to remind ourselves of the Biblical definition of love. Love is not primarily a feeling. You can't command someone to feel a certain way about somebody else. Love, according to the Bible, is a commitment of the will. It's a choice to die to myself, to consider somebody else more important than myself. It's a decision to give myself away for the good of another. That isn't about my feelings; it's about my will and my choice to either do that or not do that. The text reminds us that ultimately **God is love**. Love comes from God and he says everyone who **...is born of God and knows God...**those are the people that love.

Now, one of the interesting questions that rolls out of these opening two verses, is whether or not an unbeliever can love. It seems like, what John is saying, is the only way you can love is to know God and to have experienced His Salvation. Now this is a rather delicate conversation, because, on one level, there's no question that people that don't believe can love. I know husbands and wives that love each other, the parents that love their children, the children love their parents, friends that love one another — there's no question about that. That too, though, is a reflection of love that comes from God. It's a reflection of what it means *to be made in the image of God*. It's what we refer to as *common grace*. It still is from God, whether they realize that or not.

But I would also suggest to you that, in our culture, love is much more selfish than most people realize. In other words, in our culture, love is still primarily about how you make **me** feel. If you make *me* feel good, if you give *me* a sense of significance, if you give *me* pleasure, if you're meeting some need in *my* life, there's a tendency, then, to understand that as love. And one of the ways that we see that, is when that relationship no longer delivers the goods — when you're no longer giving me pleasure, when you're no longer making me happy, when you're no longer making me feel significant, you're no longer giving me what I long for. We tend to start distancing ourselves from that relationship, sometimes even to the point where we terminate that

relationship, which reminds us that probably wasn't so much about love, because as long as I wasn't getting what I wanted, and what I needed, I wasn't that interested in the relationship anymore.

It's also possible that we, together, can be a very loving family, but that can be very selfish in its orientation. A husband, a wife and kids — as long as *we* love each other and make each other feel good and we're happy — we're satisfied. And it doesn't really matter to us that there are people outside of our little circle that are struggling, that are in pain, that are in despair. As long as I have what I need, as long as we're happy, that's all that really matters. And that orientation, while it may be thought of as love in our culture, is still very selfish at the end of the day. It's very different than the love that Jesus defined. Jesus said, "Love your enemy." Jesus said, "Love those who persecute you." Jesus modeled for us what it means to love, as He spent time with those that the culture were unwilling to love. He hung out with sinners and tax-collectors and prostitutes. He hung out with the sinners and misfits and losers. He touched the untouchables; He loved the unlovable, and really raised the bar on love to a level the world had not seen before.

So when John is talking about this love that is from God, he's talking about that which comes from the very heart of God — the very essence of God — and for us to experience that kind of love and to love that way, something deep within us has to change. Something has to be transformed, for us to love as God loves. So that's what he's talking about. You can't do that apart from experiencing the love of God.

In Chapter 2, we talked about two different operating systems: a system of *grace* and a system of *the world*. As long as you're still operating according to the operating system of the world, you cannot love. The system itself won't allow that. As long as you choose to be your own god, and to define your own significance, and your own value, based on your own performance, then for you, life is a competition. Life is all about comparison. Every single person in your world is a competitor and, as long as that's true, I can't afford to die to myself. I cannot afford to give myself away, because what I'm giving away is my significance. What I'm giving away is my value, and I can't afford to do that, and so I will never really be free to love. It's only when we have experienced a life change, through Jesus Christ, that we can be rightly related to God, and through that relationship, I get my significance and my value, which now sets me free, not to have to perform for my significance and value. So I'm free now to die to myself and to give myself away, because my significance and value is rightly rooted in God. Until I make that change in operating systems, I'll never really be free to love without expectation.

Verse 9:

By this the love of God was manifested in us (*or among us*), that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. 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*. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (Vs. 9-11)

The key phrase is that phrase **By this...** In other words, this is how God unveiled His love — He manifested His love; He revealed it; He unveiled it. The text reminds us, that God was willing to

give up His own Son, in order that we might experience life. The love of God is not religious theory. It was demonstrated; it was unveiled; it was made known; it was manifested.

What was the price tag necessary to make this possible? The answer is: **God gave his only begotten Son**, the only unique Son of God. For example, Isaac was referred to as Abraham's only begotten son. It wasn't Abraham's *only* son, but it was his *unique* son. So, the term basically means this was God's unique Son, His special Son, that He was willing to sacrifice, in order to remove the obstacle that we might experience His life.

So let's process it this way: Patti and I have three beautiful girls and I love them with all my heart. If you were to ask me to die for them, I wouldn't even have to think about it. I would do it in an eye-blink. But that's not the question. The question is: would I be willing to sacrifice the life of one my girls, in order to save the life of another? Would I willingly be able to put one of my girls forth to die, in order to save someone else? But let's take it up a notch. Would I be willing to do that, knowing that my girl would be mocked, would be spit upon, would be flogged, and ultimately tortured to a slow, cruel death? Would I be willing to do that to her, for the sake of another? But let's ratchet that up one more time.

Would I be willing to give one of my girls to be mocked, to be scoffed at, to be flogged and to be tortured to death, for someone who has declared himself to be my enemy, someone who was a terrorist, at war with me? Would I be willing to do that? The answer is, "Absolutely not! – Absolutely not; never in a million years would I ever do that to one of my girls! I absolutely, positively would never do that!"

But God did...God did! It's easy to dismiss this, and think somehow it's different with God and His Son — like He has no feelings. Every emotion, every feeling I have, ultimately comes from God. My capacity to love my daughter and to protect my daughter comes from God. Whatever I feel towards my own child, God felt towards His Son times ten! The Bible says we were enemies of God. We were living in rebellion against God. We were terrorists against God, when God chose willingly to give up His own Son, that we might have life. Whatever you might question concerning God, *the one thing that cannot reasonably be questioned is the love of God*, because God's love is not religious theory. I understand that sometimes it feels like God is a million miles away, and He doesn't care. Trust me, I have been there — I get that. But the one thing that cannot be reasonably questioned is God's love, because God put His love on display for the world to see. And if God so loves me and indwells me, then shouldn't I, as the child of God, love others as well?

Verse 12:

No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. (Vs. 12-14)

No one has seen God in all His glory, but Jesus came to Earth, in order to make God known, and this God that so loved us, **abides in us and we abide in Him** — and we experience His love. It's not that we loved *Him*. It's that He loved *us*. He actually gives us the capacity to love Him back. The whole cycle has to start with Him. He has given us His Spirit; He has given us His seed; He has given us His life, that we might not only love God, but, *out of that, we might love one another*.

He says it to the point that that's how the world will see God. That's the point he's trying to make. What is the evidence on the table that this is actually true? And the answer is: as God comes into us and transforms us and changes us from the inside out, something radically has changed — and it gives evidence that this story is indeed true.

Verse 15:

Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. (Vs. 15-16)

Now some of this feels like it's going in circles a little bit. But, in essence, what he's saying is: *when we confess Jesus as Savior, we receive the love of God. God gives us then the capacity to love Him back and the capacity to love others. He abides in us; we abide in Him; and through that, the love of God is known — or experienced — in the world.*

Verse 17:

By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.

Because He abides in us and we abide in Him, when He returns, this will not be a day of fear; this will not be a day of condemnation. We should have confidence in that day; that when He comes back — and John has already talked about this — Jesus will be revealed for who He is. *The world shall see Him as He is, in all of His glory, and every knee will bow and every tongue will confess.* And about the time we have this magnificent picture of Jesus, we are reminded that John says, *And in that moment we, as His children, shall be like Him.* This is not a day to dread; this is a day to celebrate. If you think about the return of Christ, and it fills your heart with panic, or it fills your heart with dread, you've misunderstood something.

He says in Verse 18:

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.

God does not motivate us by fear. Fear is what religion is made of. Religion is full of fear. It's full of this idea that if I step out of line, God's going to whack me, and so I do this religious activity, because that's what's expected; that's what's required. Religion is filled with the idea that God is in the heavens and He's angry, and you have to appease Him, and if you don't appease Him, He's going to whack you. If that's your image of God, you have completely misunderstood.

We, as parents, understand that fear and intimidation is a very effective way to motivate your children. This is one of the problems with it. It really works...for a while. But you will ultimately pay a significant price for parenting that way. Religion parents through fear and intimidation. It creates an image of God — where we do what we do, because we're afraid of

God, and we're afraid of the consequences. But God isn't like that! God motivates out of love. Even though the Bible is clear that there is a reality of Hell after death, to those who reject Him, it's never a doctrine that is presented as the reason why you trust Christ as Savior. You don't trust Christ as Savior "...because it's sure better than going to Hell!" The message is always a message of love: ...because God loves us...because God gave up His life for us...because God invites us into the dance; He wants us to experience life as He intended it to be. It's always driven by love. When He comes back, it is going to be a beautiful, glorious reunion, and we should long for that day when we will see Him in all His glory and He will reveal us as magnificent trophies of His grace — that He has created from the inside out.

Verse 19:

We love, because He first loved us. If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also. (Vs. 19-21)

Again, John is dealing with the false teachers who are saying they know God; they love God; they're enlightened by God; but their lives simply did not give any evidence. They were unloving; they were immoral. He's contrasting that with those who have believed the truth. Now the idea of God being invisible and people being visible carries this idea: how do you love God? *How do you love God who is invisible? - by loving the people around us, who are visible.* If you aren't loving the people around you, how do you love God? It's just empty talk. That's, in essence, what he's saying. If there isn't some evidence of the presence of God in you, of the love of God in you, in loving the people around you, how do you really love one who is invisible? There's no evidence of that; there's no manifestation of that.

The reminder in this text is, ultimately love comes from God. **God is love.** Therefore, **to experience true community and to love without expectation, you must experience the love of God.** This is really important to understand, because I think a lot of people are trying to create community by doing an end-run *around* God. A lot of the people that seem the most desperate for community are people who are disgruntled with God, people who are angry with God, people who are frustrated with God, people who have distanced themselves from God. And they are, in essence, trying to do an end-run around God, and trying to use some form of community to meet that God-need that their soul is longing for. That will never work. You can't experience community by doing an end-run around God. Ultimately, you have to experience His love, and **it's the love of God that gives us the capacity to love Him back. It gives us the capacity to love the people around us. And when we love without expectation, we will experience the community we long for.** Again, I think the spirit of the text is not saying to the people, "Man, you need to get with it!" It is actually saying, "Hey, look inside of you! Something has really changed, which is evidence the message is really true."

God calls us to love without expectation, and, in so doing, we unknowingly create the community that our souls are longing for.

Community is a term used a lot in Christian circles, but it's a term that's hard to define, and it's even harder to experience. As one Christian writer put it, people who only dream of community usually destroy it, but those who love people without expectation, unknowingly create it. True

Christian community requires both an understanding and belief in the truth of who Jesus is, and who we are in Christ. It's not something that we just turn off and on like a light switch. It's a way of life. It's a value. It's not something we just go out and make happen, but rather it's the result, the outflow, of the life of Christ in us, and living out the love of God in us to others. **If your heart longs for true deep community, then it starts with you. Go out and love others without expectation. Love others as Christ has loved you and see what happens.**