

1 John

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1 John 4:11-14

Vss. 11-13

- Typically when we think about what a love relationship means, because we are selfish creatures, we think that if someone loves me then I must love them back, and if I love them they will love me. So when a young man professes his love to his girlfriend he does so with the hope and expectation that she will love him back. If a newlywed loves their in-laws it is with the hope and expectation that they will return that love. But it is not this way with God. God’s love is not *eros*, the Greek word for romantic love, nor is it *phileo*, the word for familial love and friendship. God’s love is *agape*. So if God so loves us, we are not told to love Him back, but to love one another. This is how we are to show God our response to His love for us, by loving others, the ones who He sent Christ to die for.
- And we need to truly understand what the essential character of *agape* love really is, for we can see it best when such love is directed toward those who are not easy to love. All too often “the least of these” are the least precisely because they are the WORST of these! Remember how Jesus treated those who crucified Him – with the forgiveness that can only be poured out of *agape* love? This is how *agape* love works and not just for Christ, but for you and me. Loving people who are easy to love is not real *agape*, because you don’t need God to do that. In Matthew 5:46-47, Jesus asks in His Sermon on the Mount, “For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?” In other words, if you only love those who love you and are gracious only to your own friends and family, how are you any different than those who do not have God in their life? Even the godless love their mothers. Even the godless can be gracious to their friends and family. Where does being Christian, being saved, being in Christ, make a difference in your life? By loving others unconditionally and sacrificially, by loving the unlovable, by loving others *agape*, just as God loves you. Then we understand the next verse in the

Sermon, vs. 48: “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

- As we stated when we looked at vss. 7-10, of primary importance to us is the understanding that our Christianity is defined not by how moral we are, nor how faithful to our church, but in our relationship to God and to others.
- Moreover, if we do in fact love one another, then the existence of God is proven to us. No one has seen Him at any time, yet if we love as He loves, He abides/lives in us and His love is perfected in us. Indeed we are only able to love as He loves BECAUSE He lives in us. So we know He lives when we see the power and presence of His love poured out of us. As we see the invisible effects of wind and electricity, we also see the invisible effect of God. Love is God’s effect. On our own we cannot love the unlovable. This is why there is such pain in the world. There are so few people in whom God lives.
- This is what Paul was trying to get us to understand in 1 Corinthians 13. To say that we have been baptized in the Holy Spirit does NOT mean that we are superior to others, empowered with the tongues of angels, and so forth. No, being baptized in the Holy Spirit means that the Holy Spirit of Christ has come to live in us so that we may love as He loves whereby we can live as He lives. We abide in Him and He abides in us so that we may love as He loves and live as He lives. THIS is what separates us from the godless, the pagan.

Vs. 14

- It is in the *agape* love of God that we can understand the salvation of the world. This is why the Jews, even the disciples, struggled so much with the idea of a messiah who wasn’t going to destroy the Romans, who came preaching love for your enemies. The Roman writer and philosopher Seneca the Younger, who was a contemporary of Jesus, is quoted by William Barclay as saying that people “were desperately conscious of ‘their weakness in necessary things.’ (They wanted) ‘a hand down to lift them up’”. So yes, God so loved the world that He sent His only Son into the world to save the world from its fears, its temptations, its anxieties, its chains, its stupidity...its sin. Because of God’s *agape* love, Christ has come to save us from all that we lay at the foot of His cross.