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Sermon Brief
Text: 1 John 4:7-21
Title: Living in Love
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Seeking to faith-
fully proclaim
the whole coun-
cil of God in
scripture!



INTRODUCTION

In the continuation of the series on “Living...” we focus today on Christian love. This theme is closely connected to last Sunday’s sermon on “Living Confidently” from 1 John 3:11-24. Both love and confidence are stressed in chapter four as well. But chapter four also has a different thrust. More explanation of the meaning of love and the importance of love are given. Such insights can be very helpful to us today as we seek to follow God’s ways in living in love. Hear the words of the apostle John to believers in ancient Ephesus at the end of the first Christian century.

7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. 15 God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. 16 So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. 17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. 19 We love because he first loved us. 20 Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. 21 The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.¹

As the apostle penned these words, they came to communities of believers in and around the city of Ephesus sometime in the late 80s to mid 90s of the first Christian century. As we mentioned last week, these communities were coming under the influence of false teachers with a doctrine of spiritual elitism and superiority through special religious experiences that elevated one’s soul to perfection. This was an early form of Gnosticism that plagued Christianity through the first half of the second century before it died out and gradually disappeared from Christian circles. Because of this elitist attitude these teachers were promoting a loveless form of Christianity, and their teachings became very divisive within the Christian communities. The apostle counteracts this false version of the gospel with a strong emphasis upon Christian love as a major

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4·13 Ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ μένομεν καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν ἡμῖν, ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος αὐτοῦ δέδωκεν ἡμῖν. 4·14 καὶ ἡμεῖς τεθεάμεθα καὶ μαρτυροῦμεν ὅτι ὁ πατὴρ ἀπέσταλκεν τὸν υἱὸν σωτῆρα τοῦ κόσμου. 4·15 ὅς ἐάν ὁμολογήσῃ ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστίν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ θεὸς ἐν αὐτῷ μένει καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν τῷ θεῷ. 4·16 καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐγνώκαμεν καὶ πεπιστεύκαμεν τὴν ἀγάπην ἣν ἔχει ὁ θεὸς ἐν ἡμῖν.

Ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν, καὶ ὁ μένων ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ ἐν τῷ θεῷ μένει καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἐν αὐτῷ μένει. 4·17 ἐν τούτῳ τετελείωται ἡ ἀγάπη μεθ’ ἡμῶν, ἵνα παρρησίαν ἔχωμεν ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς κρίσεως, ὅτι καθὼς ἐκεῖνός ἐστιν καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐσμεν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ τούτῳ. 4·18 φόβος οὐκ ἐστίν ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ ἀλλ’ ἡ τελεία ἀγάπη ἔξω βάλλει τὸν φόβον, ὅτι ὁ φόβος κόλασιν ἔχει, ὁ δὲ φοβούμενος οὐ τετελείωται ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ. 4·19 ἡμεῖς ἀγαπῶμεν, ὅτι αὐτὸς πρῶτος ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς. 4·20 ἐάν τις εἴπῃ ὅτι Ἀγαπῶ τὸν θεόν καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ μισῆ, ψεύστης ἐστίν· ὁ γὰρ μὴ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ὃν ἑώρακεν, τὸν θεὸν ὃν οὐχ ἑώρακεν οὐ δύναται ἀγαπᾶν. 4·21 καὶ ταύτην τὴν ἐντολὴν ἔχομεν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ, ἵνα ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν θεὸν ἀγαπᾶ καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ.

ingredient of truth Christianity. This emphasis is especially present both in his gospel writing and in this first letter.

To be Christian is to live in love. To not live in love is to not be Christian. This is the heart of John's words here in chapter four. The passage breaks itself down into three separate emphases: love's meaning (vv. 7-12); love's experience (vv. 13-16a); and love's anticipation (vv. 16b-21). Let's take a look at these.

BODY

I. Living in love: its meaning, vv. 7-12

7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is made complete in us.

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John begins with an admonition: let us love one another (ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους). The way he introduces it is important. He addresses his readers as 'beloved,' that is, those who are objects of God's love (Ἀγαπητοί). Then he gives the reason for the admonition: **because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God** (ὅτι ἡ ἀγάπη ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν, καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀγαπῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται καὶ γινώσκει τὸν θεόν). John's point is clear. Authentic Christian love has its origin in God. When we love one another correctly we are reflecting the presence of God in our life. Then in verse eight the opposite is also true: **Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.** Christian love and God are inseparably linked together. The presence of genuine Christian love is an indication of a saving knowledge of God that has brought the presence of God into one's life to enable him or her to love others, especially within the community of faith, the way God loves them.

Anyone professing to be a Christian and not demonstrating such love, John declares, absolutely does not know God. His ἔγνω use of the verb for knowing God stresses a couple of important aspects. The particular verb uses underscores knowledge gained through experience. What John asserts here is that lack of love clearly signals lack of having experienced God coming into one's life in salvation. Additionally the tense of the Greek verb, the Aorist tense, further underscores the conversion moment as the point of experiencing God coming into one's life.

The implications of this are profound. In many Christian communities today a lot of strife and anger can be found. Church members gripe and criticize one another out of anger and lack of respect. Little love can be found in such churches. The clear implications of John's words for such a situation is to raise serious questions about the genuineness of the Christianity of these individuals. To live in anger and negative criticism of others is to not be a Christian, no matter what we profess or claim.

Thus to love is to be born of God. **But what is love?** The world we live in today has virtually no understanding of the kind of love John is talking about. The Merriam-Webster Online dictionary gives nine meanings of the English word love.² Virtually all nine definitions refer to love as a feeling or attitude toward another person. This is something very different from what John is talking about. Christian love is not a feeling nor an

²M-W Dictionary on love: 1 a (1) : strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties <maternal love for a child> (2) : attraction based on sexual desire : affection and tenderness felt by lovers (3) : affection based on admiration, benevolence, or common interests <love for his old schoolmates> b : an assurance of love <give her my love>

2 : warm attachment, enthusiasm, or devotion <love of the sea>

3 a : the object of attachment, devotion, or admiration <baseball was his first love> b (1) : a beloved person : darling — often used as a term of endearment (2) British — used as an informal term of address

4 a : unselfish loyal and benevolent concern for the good of another: as (1) : the fatherly concern of God for humankind (2) : brotherly concern for others b : a person's adoration of God

5 : a god or personification of love

6 : an amorous episode : love affair

7 : the sexual embrace : copulation

8 : a score of zero (as in tennis)

9 capitalized Christian Science : god

attitude. Instead, Christian love is a commitment and an action toward another. John makes this abundantly clear in verses nine through twelve.

First, true love is defined on the cross: God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. God showed us true love in His sending Jesus to die on the cross. Love has commitment and sacrifice. It is not wishing something to be different. Rather it is concrete commitment to a sacrificial action to benefit the other person. Also, true love seeks to bless and uplift the other person. Jesus died for us so that we might live, John says. When you love someone, what is the impact on their life? Are they helped? Is their life made better? Think through this carefully, now. This kind of love seeks to actually benefit others. This means that, just like God's love, our love can have a disciplining tone when discipline is the right way to make the other person a better individual. Hebrews 12:5-13 speaks of the 'discipline of the Lord' as an expression of His love.³ God loves us and is committed to doing everything needed to make our life holy and full.

Second, Christian love is not something we show to God. Rather it is God's love flowing into our life: In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. We in our actions and attitudes don't define love. Instead, God defines love and through cleansing us in the blood of Christ enables His love to take up residence in our life so that our love becomes His love flowing through us. Christian love then is not the Christian loving others. Rather, it is God loving others through the Christian. This divine love fills our life and then flows out of our life into the life of others.

Third, we must release this love in our life: Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is made complete in us. We must never become a "Dead Sea" seeking to dam up this love of God for ourselves. Instead, we must be a "Sea of Galilee" taking in the love of God and then releasing it to flow out into the lives of others. Only in this way does the love of God completely saturate our life. This is the point especially of John's last statement in verse twelve: ἡ ἀγάπη αὐτοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν τετελειωμένη ἐστίν. By releasing this divine love to flow out of our life, this love fills up our life and itself becomes full or matured into a complete expression.

Folks, this is Christian love. It's not some warm feeling of affection. It's not even devotion to others. Certainly, it's not something that we ourselves do or even can do. Indeed, authentic Christian love is allowing the God of love to live in us and to control our life and then to love others through us.

II. Living in love: experiencing it in Christ, vv. 13-16a

13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. 15 God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. 16 So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

4:13 Ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ μένομεν καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν ἡμῖν, ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος αὐτοῦ δέδωκεν ἡμῖν. 4:14 καὶ ἡμεῖς θεαίμεθα καὶ μαρτυροῦμεν ὅτι ὁ πατήρ ἀπέσταλκεν τὸν υἱὸν σωτήρα τοῦ κόσμου. 4:15 ὅς ἐάν ὁμολογήσῃ ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστίν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ θεὸς ἐν αὐτῷ μένει καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν τῷ θεῷ. 4:16 καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐγνώκαμεν καὶ πεπιστεύκαμεν τὴν ἀγάπην ἣν ἔχει ὁ θεὸς ἐν ἡμῖν.

The ability to experience Christian love depends entirely upon one's relationship with Christ. This is John's point in verses thirteen through sixteen a. How do we know our relationship with God exists. John says its because we have the presence of God's Spirit through our faith commitment to Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world. Faith in Christ is the key to relationship with God.

Now faith is not something we keep to ourselves. In verse fifteen, faith is open confession of Jesus as the Son of God. We can say we believe in Jesus, but until we openly confess Him before others we have no saving faith in Christ. The nature of the Greek verb used by John (ὁμολογήσῃ) makes it clear that this confession begins in conversion. The apostle Paul means the same thing in his word to the Christians at Rome (Rom. 10:8-13):

8 But what does it say? "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); 9 because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God

³NRSV: 5 And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children — "My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him; 6 for *the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts.*" 7 Endure trials for the sake of discipline. God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline? 8 If you do not have that discipline in which all children share, then you are illegitimate and not his children. 9 Moreover, we had human parents to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not be even more willing to be subject to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share his holiness. 11 Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. 12 Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. 11 The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. 13 For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

So the crucial question today is whether you have made this confession of Jesus as Lord before others in open declaration of your faith. Don't forget Jesus' own words at this point (Matt. 10:32-33):

Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

This confession is an open declaration that we are committed to Jesus as God's Son and our Savior. In five separate places in 1 John, and again in 2 John, the apostle stresses this point repeatedly:

1Jo 1:9. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1Jo 2:23. No one who denies the Son has the Father; everyone who confesses the Son has the Father also.

1Jo 4:2. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,

1Jo 4:3. and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world.

1Jo 4:15. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God.

2Jo 1:7. Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh; any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist!

Relationship is defined by John as 'abiding' in Christ: μένομεν. And also as God 'abiding' in us: μένει.

The concept is rather simple. To abide is to have an ongoing relationship, a connection that continues. Not a spasmodic meeting up with. Rather a permanent relationship based on our faith commitment to Christ in conversion. We know that we know Him because we

In this faith based relationship **comes both the presence of God's Spirit (v.13) and of God's love (v. 16a)**. This connection between the Spirit of God and God's love is intentional. Any claim to the presence of God's Spirit in one's life without a demonstration of authentic Christian love is a false claim. This was the contradiction of John's Gnostic opponents at Ephesus. They claimed the Spirit because they could speak in tongues. John utterly denied this (cf. 1 John 4:1-3) and instead insisted on the demonstration of Christian love as evidence of the Spirit's presence. The Spirit activated love of God is what we can trust and believe in, says John in verse 16a.

Do you know God? Then, are you loving others? Through God's love flowing through you into their lives? This is the clear indicator that we are genuinely Christian.

III. Living in love: preparing for judgment day, vv. 16b-21

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. 17 Love has been made complete among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love, but mature love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached maturity in love. 19 We love because he first loved us. 20 Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. 21 The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

Ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν, καὶ ὁ μένων ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ ἐν τῷ θεῷ μένει καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἐν αὐτῷ μένει. 4·17 ἐν τούτῳ τετελείωται ἡ ἀγάπη μεθ' ἡμῶν, ἵνα παρρησίαν ἔχωμεν ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς κρίσεως, ὅτι καθὼς ἐκεῖνός ἐστιν καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐσμεν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ τούτῳ. 4·18 φόβος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ ἀλλ' ἡ τελεία ἀγάπη ἔξω βάλλει τὸν φόβον, ὅτι ὁ φόβος κόλασιν ἔχει, ὁ δὲ φοβούμενος οὐ τετελείωται ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ. 4·19 ἡμεῖς ἀγαπῶμεν, ὅτι αὐτὸς πρῶτος ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς. 4·20 ἐάν τις εἴπῃ ὅτι Ἀγαπῶ τὸν θεόν καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ μισῶ, ψεύστης ἐστίν· ὁ γὰρ μὴ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ὃν ἑώρακεν, τὸν θεὸν ὃν οὐχ ἑώρακεν οὐ δύναται ἀγαπᾶν. 4·21 καὶ ταύτην τὴν ἐντολὴν ἔχομεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, ἵνα ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν θεὸν ἀγαπᾷ καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ.

John moves in verses 16b-21 to how love prepares us to face the impending judgment of God. When we are loving through God's love in our life that love is maturing and coming to complete expression. One of the significant blessings of this is confidence (παρρησίαν) as we face the future. This process of the maturing of Christian love, John declares, to so **that we may have boldness on the day of judgment**.

Folks, **judgment day is coming for every one of us**. On that day we as Christians will stand before the King of this universe to give account of how we have sought to serve Christ. Paul makes this very clear (2 Cor. 5:10-11):

For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for

what has been done in the body, whether good or evil. 11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences.

Jesus indicated that this judgment would extend down to every word that we have ever spoken (cf. Matt. 12:36-37):

36 I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter;

37 for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

I don't know about you, but this is enough to make me nervous about judgment day. To know that my entire life is going to be paraded as an open book before Almighty God and His saints on judgment day is enough to generate some fear and dread.

But John asserts that **God's love flowing in fullness from our life into the lives of others is the remedy to that fear**. This is the meaning of verses 17-18. The power of divine love is assurance that we are walking the paths of God and thus can anticipate being able to give a good accounting of ourselves before God. We can live our Christian life in confidence. Paul put it this way in 2 Cor. 5:6-9 that leads up to his declaration of judgment in verse 10:

6 So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord — 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 9 So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.

John reemphasizes the divine nature of Christian love in verses 19-21. It is God's love working in and through us. It is God's love being expressed to fellow believers. This is spiritual reality; it is God's command to us. Anything less means we are living a lie in claiming to be the children of God.

CONCLUSION

Wow! Living in Love! A powerful principle of scripture. And an absolutely essential one to genuine Christianity. The blessing of God's love planted in us through His Spirit powerfully transforms our living and prepares us to face God in final judgment.

How loving are you?