

## GOD IS LOVE

1 John 4:1-21 (Key verse 4:16b)

*God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.*

Last week we newly heard the message we heard from the beginning of our Christian lives....That we should love one another. We also learned what love is through Jesus Christ who laid down his life for us. Through this one phrase we learned how to love one another in 5 practical ways. Now, I don't know about you, but this week when I tried to put God's word into action, I really battled. Was it just me? I discovered it is almost impossible to treat someone in a good way when they hurt or disappointed me. Likewise, it is so hard to humbly and patiently serve someone who selfishly treats me as if their agenda is more important than mine. Not to mention to sacrifice my time, my resources, and even my own plans to serve and help such a selfish person who upset me! It is far easier to just give them lip service instead of loving them with action and in truth. Do you agree?

Sadly, to love another person with God's love goes directly against our.....selfish.....inborn nature. When we careful consider how we live our lives, we will see that our every action and our every word is aimed at protecting and or advancing our own best interests. Therefore, even though we are born again Christians.....believers who lives with God's Spirit in us, it is seemingly impossible..... to lay down our lives for another undeserving and sinful person. The sacrifice just seems too big and the loss too much to bear!! Also, the injustice of embracing someone who wrongly treated us unfairly is simply unbearable; right!?

This begs two questions. Firstly, HOW can we overcome our selfish inborn nature..... to obey God's command to love another person? Secondly, why is it so important that we love one another? In today's passage, we will answer both these questions. May the Holy Spirit softened our hearts to newly accept God's word today! Amen.

Look at verses 1-3. Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God..... Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist. Here we can see there are two kinds of spirits in this world; namely the Spirit of God (the Holy Spirit) and the spirit of the antichrist. (The spirit of Satan) Whenever an opportunity arise for us to love another person..... both of these unique spirits try to influence our behavior.

On the one hand the Holy Spirit reminds us of truth (6) that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh and laid down His life for us. Then we remember God's love for us. We also remember how Jesus practically laid down His life for us. When we remember this truth, we can surely overcome our selfish nature to love another person. On the other hand, the spirit of the antichrist is out to distract us with falsehood. (6) Unlike God's Spirit, it does not acknowledge Jesus. In fact, the spirit of the antichrist rejects God's love for us through Jesus. Instead, to confuse believers it uses false teachers to preach a prosperity gospel all over the world. But God does not want us to use Jesus as a vending machine to pursue selfish gain and financial prosperity. For in pursuing financial prosperity, we forget God's love through Christ and fail to love one another. No! God wants us to learn from Jesus who He is and how to love one another. That is why we must never believe any message from false prophets. In fact we must not even listen to a single word they preach, because the spirit of the antichrist use these messages to feed our selfish inborn nature so we hate others like Cain hated his brother.....instead of loving one another as God commanded us. Then who must we listen to? Yes, we must only listen and obey the

Holy Spirit who lives in us. Look at verse 4. The one who is in [us] is greater than the one who is in the world. We can listen to the Holy Spirit when we study the Bible. And as we study and listen to the Word of God (like now) the Holy Spirit reveals to us who God truly is.

Look at verses 7-8 (Read) We all have an understanding of who we think God is. Generally, believers say God is Almighty .....or Holy ..... or Righteous..... or Faithful..... Or Merciful. Although these are indeed all characteristics of God, not one of these describe who God is at His core. But here in verse 8, Apostle John tells us clearly who God is. God is love ..... Let's think about this for a moment..... God is love..... What exactly does this mean? It means everything God does is marked by love. When God carries out justice, He does so in love. When God corrects or guides us in life, He does so in love. When He carries out His salvation work through Jesus Christ, He does so in love. Everything God does.....whether big or small.....is done by and in love.....For God is love!

This description of God challenges so many things within us, right?! Firstly, it challenges our view and perception of God and how He operates..... Secondly, and in context of today's passage, it challenges how we view our ability.....or should I rather say inability .....to love one another. For look again at verse 7. It reads, since God is love..... love comes from God. This means, since God is the source and origin of love.....you and I cannot love a single person (as God intends) with our human ability.....for God's love does not exist in us. In fact, if we did not know God there was absolutely no way for us to ever imagine that something like God's love existed. This explains why (look again at verses 7b-8) everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. But whoever does not love does not know God. Indeed, we can only know what love is when God graciously shows His love to us.

Look at verses 9. (Read) You and I were living in sin. We did not know God nor did we seek after Him. Rather, we were hostile to God and so became His enemies. (Rom 5:10; 8:7) Now if you and I were in God's shoes, we would most certainly deal with ourselves like we deal with anyone who stands against us, right? We will deal harshly with them. But God is different. For it is exactly here, in our lack of love, where God showed His love to us. Instead of dealing harshly with us as our sins deserve, God did the most amazing thing for us!! He sent his one and only Son into the world not to condemn us.....but that we might live through him. What do we call this kind of selfless and unconditional behavior? Yes, this is love!! To treat someone with so much kindness and mercy and goodness.....when all they deserve is condemnation and punishment. This is what love looks like!!! Who can love like this? Only God, because God is love! This is who God is and what He naturally does.....He loves!

Look at verse 10. If we were still sinless and behaved perfectly in the eyes of God, we could easily expect God to sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for us. But this would not be love; for God would only be treating us as we deserve. However, this is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us while we were still in our sin (Rom 5:8) by physically sacrificing His one and only Son for us..... This is mind blowing stuff, right!! Yet this is who God is: God is love! And this is what He does every day – He loves us deeply and unconditionally; as we live by faith in His Son Jesus Christ! When we understand this love that God has lavished on us.....we will not only be able to love one another in the same way.....but we will actually want to love one another.....just as God so loved us. (11) This then is the answer to the first questions as to HOW we can overcome our selfish inborn nature..... to love another person. As we study the bible, we must listen to the Holy Spirit who reveals to us through Scripture who God is. God is love!!! When we know this.....when we understand what it is through Jesus Christ, then we can and surely will overcome our selfish nature.....to love one another.

This brings us to our second question for today: Why is it so important that we love one another? Look at verse 12. (Read) Here we get our first glimpse as to why we must love one another. For if we do, God begins to work powerfully in and among us. Firstly, even though no one has ever seen God if we love one another..... God becomes visible to the world. How did God show His love to us? Yes, it was by practically sacrificing His one and only Son for our sins. When we see this act.....we look straight in the face of God! The same is true for when we selflessly and unconditionally love another person. We cannot see the wind, but we can see it exists as it blows through the leaves in a tree. Likewise, if we love one another, people can see the invincible God by His love in our lives. People will see the very face of God! This is the first reason why we should love one another. For it is through our love that God is revealed to the world!

Look again at verse 12. The second reason why we should love one another, is because when we love one another God's love is made complete in us. Without loving one another, we can never completely experience the wonder of God's love. It's like only seeing someone else graduate from university. Unless we graduate ourselves, without pain, stress & struggles, we will never personally know what it feels like to walk over the stage in our academic robes. The same goes with God's love. It is only when we go over from theory to practicals, from reading about loving others to actually doing it that we can know the fullness of God's love.

In our struggle to overcome our selfishness, the love He implants within us starts to germinate, extend, grow and bear fruit. It molds us and perfect His love within our characters. Only then, can we "know" the fullness of God's love in such a way that it is as real to us as the chair you are sitting on today. And as you rely on the chair to hold you up, so you can confidently rely on the love God has for you to hold you up – in every and any situation you face in your life. (16)

Let's look at the third reason why we should love one another. Look at verse 16b. Can we please read it all together? God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. When we love one another we live in love. And since God is love..... when we live in love we are in fact living in God. (Isn't that awesome!!) Suddenly, as we live in God..... we stop to think and behave like a selfish sinner ..... Instead God's thinking becomes our thinking. And God's way of doing becomes our way of doing!! Then like God, we naturally begin to think and behave in a selfless manner to unconditionally love others.....no matter what the situation or circumstances we face. If the first two reason why we should love still left you unconvinced, then this third reason should leave you with no doubt!!! We all have a longing for God. We all want to personally experience God and live Him. Now, perhaps for the first time, we have learned that the only way for this to happen is when you and I..... live in love.....by selflessly.....and unconditionally..... love one another, as God loved us through His Son Jesus Christ.

Let's pause here for a moment to consider how..... living in love transforms our relationship with God. In verses 17-18 we see that if we live in love, we will have confidence on the day of judgment: because we live like Jesus here in this world. Now this does not mean we are holy like Jesus. Instead, it means we are like him in having the assurance of God's love as his beloved children. As Jesus called God "Father," we also can call God "Father." In this respect we can have the same confidence as Jesus. Before being born again, we could not come to God or stand before him because we were so fearful. But fear is a symptom of sin. When we commit sin, we lose peace in our hearts and dread God's inevitable punishment. Whenever something bad happens, we assume it is because of our sins and become fatalistic. But God's perfect love drives out fear and gives us true rest and peace. This is the

powerful work of God's love that we experience when we love one another. Now, we can come to God with confidence.

In conclusion: God is love. This means everything God does is marked by love. He expressed His love in the clearest manner by sacrificing His one and only Son while we were still deeply in sin. When we understand that this is love, then we know who God truly is. At the core of His being, He is love.

Now, it is one thing to understand this theoretically. But it is quite another to know this practically. For to know God's love practically is to know it personally and truly. That is why we must love one another! I sincerely pray that we become a ministry filled with people who love one another and so personally and truly come to know that God is love. Amen.