

INTRODUCTION

Let me just remind you once again how John structures this letter for he has a very unusual style. John raises a subject, deals with it but then returns to it later and develops the subject further. This is what he is doing in this section for he has already dealt with the subject of love in 2:7-11 and 3:11-18. Now he tackles it again, he repeats something of what he has said before and then adds something new.

Now the most striking phrase in these verses is found in verse 8. The Phrase 'God is love' is one of the most profound statements in the whole bible and for some people it is one of the hardest statements to believe. So let's look at this statement

1. GOD IS LOVE (vs. 7-8)

When we see the evil and suffering in this world with so many damaged and broken lives people ask how can God claim to be love when our world is in a mess. Yet John insists that love is the very nature of God its not that God loves and acts in loving ways but at the very heart of God's being is love. This is an amazing statement for when we consider all the statements about God in the bible we can only conclude that God is almighty majestic and awesome. Yet this statement about God puts some feeling into God he is not so great that he is not concerned about us but because he is love and so great then he must act towards us out of a loving heart. Love is not a quality that God possesses but love is the very essence of God's being. It is not simply that God loves but that He is love. I think we are helped to understand this when we remember that God is revealed in Scripture as the holy Trinity, three persons in one God.

We shall never be able to comprehend the full meaning of this with our finite minds but at least we can grasp that at the heart of the deity there is an interrelationship of love. Love flows between the three persons of the Trinity in constant interaction. So that every activity of the Godhead expresses the love which is the essence of divine nature. The Father loves the Son the Son loves the Father and the Holy Spirit loves the Son and Father and so on. This is not some abstract truth but this is a living active reality within the Godhead.

God loves within his own being because his nature is to love. Therefore because God is love he loves us and that love does not depend on our attractiveness or worthiness for that is how human love very often operates. God's love is utterly different from human love for it cannot be earned and it is not deserved but yet God loves because that is his nature. This helps us to understand more clearly what John means when he says that love comes from God. He is the source of all true love. Therefore in the context of this letter John is able to say that that everyone who loves is born of God and knows God (v 7). Of course John is not saying that everyone who loves is born of God, John is clearly taking about Christian love he is clearly talking about this in the context of false teachers who claimed to know God but who did not love God's people.

John says that anyone who shows Christian love to his fellow believers is clearly demonstrating the fact that God is love and therefore such a person is born of God and knows God. Romans 5: 5 tells us that God pours his love into our hearts so that we are able to love like God loves. God loves his people so will everyone who is born of God. This does not mean that the unbeliever cannot love for we know that to be untrue.

We may well have experienced the love of unbelievers. But the unbeliever can only love because God is love he is the true source of love and when God created us he created us in his image we have the mark of God even though that mark has been marred through sin, unbelievers are still able to love in some ways. That love between unbelievers is part of God's common grace to

mankind that makes living on this planet a little more tolerable and pleasant but we must not confuse it with Christian love.

The believer's love for one another is different for it is a special quality of divine love that marks real Christian fellowship. What this means is that the absence of love in those who claim to be believers is a mark of unbelief and no matter what that person might claim about their relationship with God their lack of real Christian love for others is clear evidence that such a person is not a Christian. Their faith is only a pretence a sham for Jesus said by this will all men know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

But Christian tonight we must stop and praise the Lord for his love. Imagine if God did not have love what sort of God would we be facing, what fear would we be feeling in our hearts what danger would we be in. But O we have a God who is love. This does not mean that he loves to the extent that everything else does not matter. The bible says he is also light which talks about his holy nature. Therefore sin and disobedience do matter to God, justice is important but if it was not the fact that God is love then we would have no hope of salvation and no future hope of living with God.

John is also aware that the word love needs definition and clarification in his day as in our day so he now focuses upon two clear evidences in which the love of God can be both seen and communicated.

2. GOD'S LOVE IS SEEN IN THE CROSS OF CHRIST (vs. 9-10)

Since God is love then all definitions of love must come from God. Only God truly shows us what love is and how it manifests itself. So true love is love that gives of oneself for the benefit of others. God sent his Son Jesus into our world so that we might live through him (v 9) and he sent Jesus to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins (v 10). Notice also that it is God who takes the initiative in this love its not that God decides to love us because we love him and therefore he decides to meet us half way.

No we never loved God in fact the opposite was the truth for us; we hated and opposed God yet in spite of this God sent his son to be our Saviour. We only came to love God because he first of all loved us. To emphasise how great this love of God for sinners is John tells us that God did not send any Son but it was his one and only son. He is precious to the Father and greatly loved by his Father yet God sent this Son into this hostile and God hating world to redeem and reconcile his people. This is the love that John is talking about.

This redemption is only possible because Jesus turns away God just wrath from sinners and takes God's just judgement upon himself for that is what is involved in this word translated 'atoning sacrifice.' Isn't it simply amazing that God should love us? God who is holy and pure, one who is perfect and just should love me a sinner, a rebel an enemy of God. He didn't wait until I cleaned up my act but he loved me in eternity past and he sent his beloved Son for me and when he died he died for my sin.

Isn't that amazing. That ought to inspire us to worship our God it ought to lead us to loving him more, it ought to move us to serve him with all our hearts souls minds and strength. But you know what is so often the case. It is often the case that we are so use to hearing this message that we take it for granted, that it no longer moves us and inspires us and the result is that we do not love him as we should and we do not serve him as we ought.

The truth is that even though we know about God's love for us we still continue to treat Him with contempt by the way that we love our sin and by the way that we love the things of this world instead of loving him who first loved us. Our love for the Lord is often like our love for our wife or

husband. Often taken for granted without any sense of appreciation or wonder that we should receive such a person's love.

3. GOD'S LOVE IS SEEN IN HOW CHRISTIANS LOVE ONE ANOTHER (vs. 11-12)

Now these verses are really the application of all that has been said so far. Because God is love and because he has shown us what love is in the cross of Jesus we who are believers are to love one another. Since God loved us and demonstrated his love to us through Jesus and since he has forgiven us and set us free, our duty is to respond to his love. We do that obviously by loving God but we demonstrate our love for God by loving those that God loves.

We are to do so with the same kind of love that God had. A love that is not self-centred and loves in order to be loved but a love, which is God centred a love, which will give of ourselves so that others may benefit. A love that is costly and is given freely for the sake of our brothers and sisters in Christ. When Christians love like this then God love is made complete in us (v 12). What does that phrase mean? Well it means that God's love has reached its fulfilment in us, it has reached its target, and it is accomplishing its purpose and fulfilling its goal.

God in saving us in Christ pours his love into our hearts so that we are able to love as God loves. When we actively show our love to our fellow believers then God's love has its fullest effect in our lives. And it is important for love to be at work within God's church for John says that it is through the church that people see God (v 12). No one has seen God, but God made himself visible through Jesus. But how do people see God today how does God make himself visible to people today.

Well its not through dreams and visions as some churches would have us think but it is through the church. As people see the church loving one another then they see God at work, they see that God lives in us. They see in his church the type of God that he is. Now this should make us stop and think about how important this responsibility to be a loving church is. If the church is the body of Christ on earth then the church must reflect his character in our relationships with one another.

The supernatural love of God for sinners like us is made more credible when unbelievers see it reflected in the life of his children. Love is the family characteristic; therefore people should be able to see Christ's love in his church. If people want to meet God today they ought to be able to find him in his church. They should encounter his love as see his church loving one another. Our world, which is very cynical when it comes to the church, needs to see down to earth real practical Christian love at work within God's church.

The church will be the nearest anyone gets to seeing the invisible God but the question it raises is what God does the world see as it looks at our church. Does it see a God who is loving in heart, who is patient, kind and who is gracious? Do they see a God who does not tolerate sin, but is committed to his cause? They will only see God if we are displaying those characteristics in our dealings with people. Are we patient with people?

Are we loving and gracious and kind in our dealings with our fellow members in the church. Are we dealing with sin in our own lives and in the lives of our fellow members and are we committed to the cause of God. I do fear that if people want to see God in the lives of some churches I know they would find it very hard. The church of Jesus Christ today is often full of jealousies and petty squabbles. It is often full of sin with people who are very uncommitted to the cause of Christ.

O how we need to pray that God will make us a church that demonstrates the love of God in the way that we treat and deal with one another. May God 's love be made complete in us may it have its fullest effect on our lives and as a result may many people in see God as he reveals himself to them through the love of the church for one another.

May God help us to love one another?

Amen