

LOVE ONE ANOTHER, PT. 1
1 JOHN 4:7-10

While it is true that you never stop being a parent, there are definitely particular transitions in the process of parenting, and this weekend Raye Jeanne and I are crossing one of the big transitions: for the first time, neither of our girls will be home during the summer (though Emily will be here on occasional weekends) and in the fall both will be away at school, so I think that means that we are now empty nesters. (That's hard for us to comprehend, and a little hard to say!)

That's made us (ok, me particularly) somewhat reflective about the parenting process and the things we did and did not do and the things we did and did not teach and the things that we still desire to build into the girls, though now from a distance. "What can I do to continue to reinforce the things we've been teaching for 18 and 21 years?"

John is in a similar situation with his churches in Asia Minor. Because false teachers infiltrated the churches and disrupted the faith of so many, he wants to affirm a number of essential truths for those who remained in those churches, and he keeps coming back to those themes throughout this letter. In fact, the letter is very hard to outline for that very reason: John keeps circling back to the same thoughts and themes. And this morning we find him back in the familiar theme of love. He spoke of this issue in 2:5-11 and then again in 3:11-24. And then in 4:1-6 John took a short detour to the topic of the work of the Holy Spirit and now in verse 7 through the end of the chapter he resumes his thoughts about love in the context of the church body.

Specifically, he is exhorting the readers to love one another...

IF WE KNOW GOD, WE MUST AND WE WILL LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

In this passage, Paul offers answers to four questions about loving one another.

- 1. Whom Should We Love? (v. 7a)**
- 2. Why Should We Love? (v. 7b)**
- 3. What if We Don't Love? (v. 8)**
- 4. How Do We Love? (vv. 9-10)**

- It should be noted that while 1 Corinthians 13 is often called the “love chapter” in the Bible, 1 John is the “love book,” and the last half of the book is particularly oriented to the theme of love and vv. 7-14 are the heart of that section: In the eight verses (7-14), the root word for love appears 15x in the Greek text.
- In this passage, Paul offers answers to four questions about loving one another.

1. Whom Should We Love? (v. 7a)

- False teachers had infiltrated the church and taught heresy concerning sin and the person of Christ. And the problem was not only that these false views arose, but it also created an attitude of superiority and arrogance among these false teachers and their followers, so that they refused to care for others in the church body — they were known for hatred (3:15; 4:20), selfishness (3:17), and cold-heartedness (3:17). In a word, one writer says, what was in these churches was “loveless to the core.” [Law, 30.]
- John is writing to counteract not only the ungodly theology of the heretics, but also the ungodly actions of the heretics. So he frequently reminds his readers that they are loved and that because God loves them they must love one another.
- Notice how he begins verse 7 — ***Beloved*** reminds the readers of his relationship with them as a spiritual father. But he is also reminding them of the love that God has for them (***love is from God***; also 2:7; 3:2, 21; 4:11).
- But John doesn’t just remind them of their position as beloved people, he also draws out an implication of that position: ***let us love one another*** (“since we are loved, let’s also love...”).
 - ✓ In fact, he puts the two words ***beloved*** and ***let us love*** side-by-side to emphasize his point.
 - ✓ There is a tone of command in John’s voice when he says this; ***let us love*** has an imperative force. It is not an optional suggestion, but an essential command. And it is not to be done once and then forgotten; it is the pattern and lifestyle of the believer. “Let us love *repeatedly* and *persistently*” is the sense of John’s words.
- There are at least two important ideas to recognize as we think of John’s command to the churches to love one another:

1. *Love can be commanded.* We tend to think of love as an emotion or feeling that happens to us and not something that we can command or control. We are either “in love” or “not in love,” but there is nothing we can do to control that state.
 - But John is saying that we *can* control the attitude and affection (feeling) of love. He is not just saying, “do loving things,” but he is also saying, “be those who demonstrate the affection of love for one another.” In other words, John is saying you *can* control the emotion of love; you can will yourself to being affectionate and loving towards others.
 - John is also simply reiterating the words of Jesus — **John 13:34-35**. Do you want to know who is a follower of Jesus? Just watch to see if he loves other followers of Jesus.
2. *Believers are commanded to love believers.*
 - What is ironic here is that John is commanding the believers to love *other believers*. We know it’s hard to love our enemies (which is why Jesus also says to love them, Mt. 5:44). But there is also a particular kind of love that believers reserve for one another (and notice that John includes himself in this command — *let us*). Everyone should love this way.
 - That doesn’t seem to be something that should be so hard. But the very fact that he has been repeatedly saying, “love one another,” indicates that it *is* hard and that believers do need to be reminded to love one another.
 - When we are training our children, we remind them often of the things that are hard for them to do (and that they are often unwilling or slow to do). No father ever says to his son, “I want you to eat all your potato chips and cookies, and then be sure to finish your ice cream.” Parents do not typically have to force their children to go to the circus or a parade. But parents often have to say, “Before you get ice cream, you must eat your vegetables; no cookies without first eating that liver...” And they also say, “No parade or sleepover with your friends until your homework is finished.” They say these things because what is good and healthy for the child — vegetables and homework — are often neglected.
 - The implication is that it is not natural for anyone to love anyone except himself. As D. A. Carson has noted, we naturally create an acceptable category of doing good things for scoundrels that we emotionally detest, effectively loving our “neighbor and [hating] his guts.” So whether it is loving other believers or our enemies, we must learn to love.
 - There should be a unique, affectionate, sacrificial commitment between us and other believers.

- Is it even possible to love in these sorts of ways? Yes, consider the apostle John himself:
 - ✓ His nickname is “the apostle of love,” because of all of his references to love in his gospel and epistles. Yet, he did not naturally love others.
 - ✓ His first name was, along with his brother James, “the Son of Thunder.” He didn’t acquire that name for being soft-spoken and unassuming and gentle. As one writer notes,

He was rugged and hard-edged, just like the rest of the fishermen-disciples. And again, he was every bit as intolerant, ambitious, zealous, and explosive as his elder brother. In fact, the one and only time the synoptic Gospel writers recorded John speaking for himself, he displayed his trademark aggressive, self-assertive, impertinent intolerance. [Mk. 9:38]

John was capable of behaving in the most sectarian, narrow-minded, unbending, reckless, and impetuous fashion. He was volatile. He was brash. He was aggressive. He was passionate, zealous, and personally ambitious — just like his brother James. They were cut from the same bolt of cloth. [MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men*, 96-97.]

- ✓ But by the time John wrote this letter, he was still bold and strong and courageous, but he has also learned to love.

John died, by most accounts, around A.D. 98, during the reign of Emperor Trajan. Jerome says in his commentary on Galatians that the aged apostle John was so frail in his final days at Ephesus that he had to be carried into the church. One phrase was constantly on his lips: “My little children, love one another.” Asked why he always said this, he replied, “It is the Lord’s command, and if this alone be done, it is enough.”

- In general, we are doing this well (and I frequently hear that from new members and visitors). But we do well to heed Paul’s words: “Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for *anyone* to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more...” (1 Thess. 4:9–10). Whom should we love? One another.

2. Why Should We Love? (v. 7b)

- It is costly to love and it is hard to love. So why should we do it? John tells us, *for* (because) ***love is from God***. In other words, “love is what God is and does and that means that love is what God’s people should do.”
 - ✓ ***Love is from God*** indicates that God is the source of love — if anyone wants to love, he will have to get that love from God (which is also what John emphasizes in v. 10).
 - ✓ But ***love is from God*** also means that love “is to be sought, hallowed, nurtured, and guarded simply by virtue of its inherent God-rootedness.” [Yarborough] We love because love is essential to God being God and we want to be like Him, which is John’s next point —

- **Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.** This phrase does not mean that everyone who does even one loving thing is a Christian. (Even unbelievers can act lovingly.)
 - ✓ But in the context he is talking about loving other believers persistently; so he means that everyone who regularly, consistently persistently, affectionately loves other believers is giving evidence that he has been **born of God** (regenerated and given a new life) and that he **knows God** (he is in fellowship and union with God).
 - ✓ Notice again the extensiveness of John's statement — **everyone who loves...** If you see someone who sacrificially and consistently loves other believers (even/especially those who are hard to love), it is evidence that he is a believer.
 - ✓ This doesn't mean that he is earning or meriting his salvation; instead it means, because he is doing something that is unnatural for the flesh to do, it is evidence that God is working that spiritual fruit of love through Him.

"When we were regenerated by the Holy Spirit, God put his divine nature within us (2 Peter 1:4). Because the nature of God is love, it also becomes our nature to love as well. Loving fellow Christians comes naturally to the believer because he has a new nature from God which is marked by love."

[Lawson, *Absolutely Sure*, 96.]

- Why should we love? Because if we are believers in Christ, this is our new nature. We are (re-)created to love others.

3. What if We Don't Love? (v. 8)

- Students will often ask a question like, "what happens if I don't turn in this paper, or if I turn it in late?" Employees want to know, "what happens if I get sick on a 'can't miss' day of work?" When I'm at the car repair shop I want to know, "what will happen if I don't make this repair?" In other words, "can I get away with it if I don't do what I should?" Or, "even if I don't get away with it, is the cost and the risk worth taking anyway?"
- So some might ask, "what if we don't love? Is it really a problem if we aren't loving?" John could not be more direct and clear with his answer.
- **The one who does not love does not know God.** Period. If someone claims to be a follower of Christ, but does not give evidence for caring for God's people, he cannot claim to know God. The lack of love is an indication of a lack of God in his life. He does not know God and he has not known God. As one writer summarized, "Not to have known love is not to have known God."

[Plummer]

"The Bible does not allow us to rest in a merely formal relationship with God. It is possible to attend every church service and prayer meeting, to read the Bible regularly, to teach and preach the Scriptures, and yet not know God. If our lives do not manifest, even dimly, something of the love of God in Jesus Christ, then we cannot claim to be Christians." [Beeke, The Epistles of John, 160.]

- The reason John says this is because of the nature of God — **God is love**.
 - ✓ By that statement, John means that it is God's essential nature to love — He doesn't merely do loving things, but He embodies love; He doesn't love people because they are deserving of that love; He loves them because it is His nature to love.
 - ✓ And John's point here is not merely to say something great about God, but notice the connection: *because* God is love, those who are God's also love. It is inconceivable that someone who is related to God could not be like God in loving God's people.
- This does not mean we overlook every offense of sin and we never exhort or encourage change. The Lord disciplines those whom he loves (Heb. 12:6ff) and the church is also called to discipline sin (Mt. 18:15ff; 1 Cor. 5:1ff; 2 Tim. 2:25-26); but it does mean that all our actions towards others should be motivated by compassionate love toward them, seeking their spiritual best.
- And if we don't do that? It simply means we ourselves do not know God or His love. We do not belong to Him.

4. How Do We Love? (vv. 9-10)

- So how will we do this task of loving other believers? Notice verse 9 — **the love of God was manifested in us** — that is, God's love was revealed in the world and among believers by the sending of Christ. And that love is also *in us* — **so we might live** (to change us inwardly).
- When we think of Christ's advent, we often think of *His* love for us — He loved us enough to take on the mantle of manhood and the sacrificial cost of death. But in these verses, John is pointing to the incarnation as evidence of the sacrificial love of *the Father* for us. How did God love us?
 - ✓ **He sent His only begotten Son** (sounds like John 3:16, doesn't it? — it should!). Before the creation of the world, He saw the devastation that sin would cause and He planned *then* (before sin even happened), to send His *unique, one-of-a-kind* Son to earth so that by believing in Him the sinners **might live** — be regenerated. His unique Son was the unique source of life.
 - ✓ But so the readers might not miss the point, John also says that life would only be provided through that Son being the **propitiation for our sins**. John is using the same term he used in 2:2

— Christ was the sacrificial atonement for sin. He who knew no sin, was sacrificed and died in our place for our sin.

- ✓ And notice again that John is pointing to the act of atonement (*propitiation*) as an act of sacrificial love *of the Father*. We understand that it was a sacrificial act of love by the Son, but how is it an act of love by the Father? In sending the Son to die on the cross, it not only meant that Christ had to be willing to die for men's sins, but it also meant that the Father had to be willing to pour out His wrath on the Son. *There* is His great love for us — He was willing to judge the Son with our sin so that He would not have to judge us in our sin.
- ✓ And notice that this was ***not that we loved God*** and so He loved us in return. No. We *hated* God. We wanted nothing to do with Him. We were running from Him. We *did not* love. *But He did love.* He initiated love when there was nothing remotely lovely about us. He did not meet us halfway. Without His coming to us, we would never have come to Him.
- Let me say that this, friends, is what Christianity is all about. If you are not a Christian, understand that just because God is love does not mean that He doesn't care about sin. No, because God is love, He cares about sin a great deal. And if He was willing to pour out His wrath against sin on His Son Jesus Christ, he will certainly be willing to pour out His wrath on you. So is there hope?
 - ✓ If you are not a Christian — you do not love God's people, you do not know God, and (some of you) do not even care that you do not know God — understand that in God's love, He will judge you for your sin of rebellion and hatred against Him.
 - ✓ But also know that if you are not a Christian, God also is compassionate, merciful and loving and has made an escape from His wrath and an escape from your sin. You don't have to sin and you don't have to pay the penalty for your sin.
 - ✓ By confessing that you are a sinner who deserves His wrath and trusting that Christ died for you and that there is nothing else that you can do to gain freedom from God's wrath, then He will forgive you of your sin. Just like in the OT sacrifice was made annually for the sins of the people of Israel and God was "propitiated" (satisfied) by that sacrifice, so Christ died for our sins, and God is fully satisfied by that death. And if this is what you want, then the Father will forgive you of your sin, and He will also come to live within you so that you no longer have to continue to live a life of sin (2:1-2). The only way out of sin is by trusting in Christ, who is the Savior of the whole world (2:2) — anyone who wants salvation will only find it in Him.
 - ✓ If you are not a Christian, will you turn away from your hatred of God today and become a lover of God instead, by asking Him to forgive you and change you?
- As we summarize, vv. 9-10 tell us how to love — by recognizing that God's love was so great for us that He was willing to pour out His infinite wrath on Christ so that we could become His children.

- ✓ How then will we withhold our love from others who have received that love from the Father?
- ✓ How will we not love those for whom God was willing to pour out His wrath on Christ?
- ✓ How will we not love those for whom Christ was willing to absorb the Father's wrath?

CONCLUSION:

“A113” ... It’s everywhere!

It’s Andy’s mom’s license plate number in Toy Story; It’s a door number in Monsters University; It’s the courtroom number in Up; It’s the camera model number in Finding Nemo; It’s on a rat’s ear tag in Ratatouille; And it’s the train number in Cars ... to name just a few. But what does it mean?

“A113” was a classroom number at the California Institute of the Arts. “If it appears in a movie,” reports BuzzFeed, “it means that a CalArts alumnus was involved with the animation.” And it’s not just in animated films. The trademark number even appears in live action films like Hunger Games and Mission Impossible. Like a digital calling card or a cinematic fingerprint, it’s a message to the public ... a CalArts alumnus was here!

What is your calling card, your fingerprint, your message to the public? How will you communicate to the world that you are an alumnus, a disciple of Christ? Jesus has a trademark number for you to consider. It’s 1J47. “Beloved, let us love one another” (1 John 4:7).