

Faith, Hope & Love—Part41

1 John 4:19

We love, because He first loved us.

When we love with God's *agape* love, it is because He first loved us. In fact, even our potential to love with God's divine *agape* love, is because He first loved us. And what have we learned about His love has been quite fantastic. In love, He did everything He needed to do to ensure that you and I can be called a true child of God. "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are" (**1 John 3:1**). Not only did the Father send His Son to be the atonement, the remedy, for our sin, but according to **Romans 8:28-30** and **Ephesians 1:5, 11** He planned every detail of our lives with the aim of our being conformed into the image of His Son. He predestined all things according to this purpose as He works all things according to the kind intention and counsel of His will. Accordingly, from the day we were born, He has loved us every moment of our now; thus, everything we have experienced, the good, the bad, and the ugly, has been purposeful and an expression of His great love for us.

And even though we have misunderstood the nature of His love as it relates to this life, He has fully explained it and not hidden anything. He told us that we have always been considered as sheep to be slaughtered. We were always chosen by **Jehovah Mekoddishkem** to be put on the altar of sacrifice. And this is why every day He is causing us to be put to death, knowing that with the death of our *flesh*,

the life of His Son may be manifested in our mortal body. He has done everything in order that the *Design Point* might actually be realized in our lives. And we now love, and have the potential to love, only because in His love He was willing to sacrifice not just Himself but everything in our lives that stands in the way of His life being made manifest in our own. **1 John 4:10**, “This is real love—not that we loved God, but **that he loved us** and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.”

The Lord has placed us on the altar of sacrifice. However, the extent to which we are willing to be the sacrifice will determine the extent to which Jesus’ life is actually made manifest in our body, which will determine the extent to which we actually love with God’s divine *agape* love. If we resist, refuse, dig in, fight, kick and scream, and hold onto what is dead and dying, all we will realize will be the “love” and so called “goodness” that can be produced from our humanity, which is woefully inadequate and insufficient when it comes to living in the Kingdom of God. And even though some of us are more capable than others in terms of human goodness and human expressions of love, all of us are absolutely incapable of producing God’s *agape* love (which is the standard for the kingdom of God). He is love, thus His love can only be known, experienced, and shared if He is actually made manifest in and through our mortal body.

This brings us back around to the practical and tangible. We have been discussing the theology of pain and suffering and understanding our need to reconcile it all to the love of God. But good theology must play out practically in the actual relationships we have with one another where God’s love is either practically experienced by others or it is not. I am afraid that if we are not careful, we will have

a lot of knowledge about these things, but if this truth does not lead to a change in our practical relationships, we will be nothing more than religious charlatans.

John 13:34-35

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

I am pretty sure I am going to get myself into all sorts of trouble here and make many people mad or at least extremely uncomfortable, but oh well. I will just say it. Throughout the centuries, many people have faith, few have true Biblical Hope as we have come to understand it, and even fewer actually love, since you must have faith in order to hope and you must have faith and hope in order to love. Johnathon Swift said that we have enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another. That is because for centuries the love of man has been dressed up and explained away as the love of God. But these two things are not the same, they are not compatible, and they derive from two entirely different sources: one is pure and holy and drives from God and the other is dark and selfish and derives from man's *Old Sinful Nature*. Yet, I bet if we took a poll, most everyone who claims they are a Christian is probably convinced that they love because they tolerate others, do good for others, try their best to love, and serve others in the name of the Lord, and so on. Yet, so few have actually walked the pathway of death but are trapped living according to the system of fear, which we are now just

beginning to understand and of which most people are clueless. And just so there is no confusion, everything which flows from the system of fear is sin, whether you do it in the name of Jesus or not. After all, whatever is not from faith is sin (**Romans 14:23**). Don't be fooled into that trap where you are bound by fear but are struggling with some area of your life or with some decision wanting to do it right and not wrong, wanting to know what God wants. Honestly, it does not matter. As long as you are living according to the system of fear, it is all sin anyways.

I cannot tell you how many times I have heard well-meaning Christians say that we just need to "love one another," which was just another way of saying, let's not confront each other, address failures, conflict with each other, deal in reality, hold each other accountable to God's definition of love, etc. They just want everything to be swept under the rug of "I tried my best" and "let's just go on" regardless of the very real hurt, pain, and the unacceptable behaviors that often are still ongoing. Trying hard to get along by ignoring what happened and is happening is not love; in that kind of relationships there can be no intimacy. In fact, it is so, so selfish and gross. Then there are others who actually believe everything they do is God's love even though their actions and attitudes are just dripping with self-interest, self-protection, manipulation, and so on. Again, the deeds which come forth from man, no matter how good, is not the same as God's divine *agape* love.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, **even as I have loved you**, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. Jesus actually repeats this command in **John 15:12** when He says, "This is My commandment, that you love one another, **just as I have loved you.**" Any time God speaks we would be wise to not gloss over

it, how much more so when He repeats Himself. It is His signal that we need to be careful how we listen. This commandment to love is a new commandment and it is His commandment. Therefore, the standard for our relationships in the Kingdom of God, with the beloved, is that we love one another in the same manner that we have been loved by Jesus; and with what we have learned about the way we have been loved, you can just imagine what that statement entails.

When we love as we have been loved, the world will know we are followers of Jesus—true disciples who walk in the same manner as He walked. After all, Jesus said in **Matthew 10:24-25**, “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master.” Thus, our goal, the goal of a true disciple, is to become like our teacher. Accordingly, the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked (**1 John 2:6**) and love as He loved. If you are one who claims the name of Christ but refuses to walk in this manner, there is a good chance that you are not a real disciple, but merely a want-to-be poser. And don’t be fooled, the way in which “Jesus loved us” is to define what it means for us to love one another. Jesus is our example and He sets the criteria of love; our own notions of good, bad, right, and wrong simply do not apply.

Now, when Jesus says a “new” commandment, the Greek word “*kainos*” is used. This denotes something as new simply because no one was accustomed to and it was not their practice to love one another in this way; but this commandment was not “new” as in the first time the concept had been introduced. If so the Greek word “*neos*” would have been used. The original concept of loving one another came from **Leviticus 19:18** which says: “...you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Thus, the idea of loving one another was not new; but Jesus obviously took it to a whole new level when He extended this responsibility to love beyond the constraints of oneself, beyond the constraints of human love and capability, and gave us His divine *agape* love as our standard.

With this understanding, I cannot over emphasize the reality that we, the beloved, have not truly understood this kind of divine love and have instead accepted so much of our own love as His. The implications of this are staggering not just to us but to the 2.1 Billion people around the world who say they are Christians. We have to take seriously what the Lord has said and not pick and choose the parts of the Bible to which we will give weight and credence and the parts we won't. The Spirit has said that the perfection or completion of His love in our lives, which leads to the expression of His divine *agape* love in and through our lives, is our confidence in the day of judgment (**1 John 4:17**). His love is the proof. This should be a bit unnerving to all of us, including the greater Christian population at large. After all consider what the Spirit says about this issue:

1 John 2:3-11

By this we know that we have come to know Him [*this means know Him for real—it's rendered in the perfect active indicative*], if we keep His commandments. [*And we know His commandment is that we love one another*] The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. [*Again, God perfects us in His love when we keep His commandment to love one another as we have been loved—which means we*

must be able to reconcile all our pain to His love to escape the bonds of fear] By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard [*to love, as you love yourself, per **Leviticus 19:18***]. On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you [*to love with His divine agape love as He has loved us*], because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining. The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

And similarly in **1 John 4:20-21**, the Spirit repeats this idea:

1 John 4:20-21

If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

Once again, I cannot emphasize enough that raising your hand and saying the sinner's prayer to accept Christ is not the proof of your being a true believer. Going to church and doing all sorts of "good" Christian things is not proof that you are a true believer. Speaking in tongues, casting out demons, healing and even working miracles in Jesus' name is not proof that you are a true believer. It is only when we love with God's divine *agape* love in the way we have been loved by God that we can have confidence about our true salvation; and it is also the only way the world will be confident that we are truly the Lord's disciples. **Matthew 7:21-23** is clear, all else can be fabricated, all else can be mimicked, all else can be conjured up and dressed up with all the accoutrements of godliness; but true love for one another is the only verifiable proof that you have come to know Him. If you claim to know God but don't love with His love, then you are a liar. And worse than that, the truth is not now in you. For whoever keeps this commandment to love, then the love of God has been perfected in them.

Are you listening carefully? Is it clear to you what the Spirit is saying to all those who claim to know Christ? The Lord was not exaggerating when He said in **Matthew 7:13-14**, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it." And even more specifically in **Luke 13:22-25**, "And He was passing through from one city and village to another, teaching, and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem. And someone said to Him, 'Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?' And He said to them, 'Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.'"

I have to tell you, when I read passages like this it makes it so much easier for me to: reconcile my pain to the love of God; press into the fire and the knife; and offer up a sacrifice of praise to God and give thanks to His name. It makes me thankful that He has loved me with an everlasting love and has been willing to go after, with an intent to kill, every single thing in me that does not come from Him. It makes me so grateful for the pain and the way my pain has caused me to look to Him to be the salvation of my life. It makes me rejoice that I have learned to live in the Hope that He will make me like Him and complete His work of perfecting His love in me. Therefore I am more than willing to continue down the pathway of death until His life is completely manifested in my body. It is the only because of the death I have realized that I am even able to love you. And it is only because of the death which lies before me that I will be able to love you as I have been loved. The road is narrow that leads to life and few find it because it is the road of death. Praise Jesus that you and I are walking down this road together for it is the only road that leads to life and love. Hallelujah.

I find it interesting that the contrast the Spirit makes in these passages (**1 John 2:3-11** and **1 John 4:20-21**) is between the extremes of love and hate, light and darkness. This is not a mistake for it encapsulates an old truth that we have talked about many times, but it is good to always keep fresh in our minds. Despite what we think, despite what we feel, despite what we have been taught is right and good, despite what we believe should be, there is no middle ground of “goodness” or an acceptable area of “not-so-badness.” There is His love and hate, light and darkness. Jesus twice made the point about there being no middle ground (again, we should pay close attention). First in **Luke 9:50** when He said, “for he who is not against you

is for you;” and second in **Luke 11:23** when He said, “He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters.” There is no middle ground of acceptable goodness. I know many of us wish it was different and wish there was a way for everyone who says they believe to fit in and be ok with God. But the truth is very segregated between those who are actually for Him and with Him and those who are not—between those who are on the narrow pathway to life (which goes through the valley of the shadow of death) and those who are on the broad path which leads to destruction. There is dark and light; there is no gray.

The point is that if you don’t love in the manner in which you have been loved, in effect you hate and are still in darkness even until now. The implication is that these people don’t believe they are in darkness, they believe they are in light. But they are wrong. There are only two kingdoms, the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world and they stand in stark and divergent contrast with one another. One is light and the other is darkness. One is built on His love and the other hate (in all its forms, including the best of human love, charity, and benevolence). There is not some middle kingdom of humanity where men get to determine good and bad, love and hate. It is an absolute fiction to believe that you are a “good” and “godly” person just because you do your best to treat people well, fairly, justly, and with respect. That might make you a great human being, but it does not mean you live as a child of the light. It just means you have learned how to behave in the kingdom of this world. This is why the Spirit says, “The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments [*the commandment to love one another*], is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (**1 John 2:4**). And that is because the mind set on the *flesh* is hostile to God; for it does not subject itself to the law of

God (the law of love), for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the *flesh* cannot please God (**Romans 8:7-8**). Again, there is no middle ground. If you are of the truth, for real, then that truth will be so transformative that you actually keep His word to love and thereby prove that the love of God has truly been perfected in you (**1 John 2:5**) and prove that you are a true son of God.

The devil has lied to us all; for generations upon generations we have actually believed that human love is equivalent to Godly love; and more so, we believe it is, and otherwise should always be, acceptable to God. This lie began early on in the story of Cain and Able in **Genesis 4**. Both kids brought sacrifices to God. Cain was a tiller of the soil and he brought to God the fruit of His labor, probably fruits, vegetables, and grain. Able however was a keeper of the flocks and brought the firstlings of his flock for a blood sacrifice. The Lord had regard for Abel and his offering; but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. In fact **1 John 3:11-12** makes it clear that Cain's offering was evil, whereas Able's offering was righteous.

1 John 3:11-12

For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.

It seems like such an innocent story. Both kids bringing the fruit of their own unique work. But Cain received no credit for trying hard and his offering to God was

completely disregarded. What made Abel's sacrifice righteous and Cain's evil? Simply because Abel followed the example of His Lord. In other words, He was willing to love God in the manner in which He had been loved. He knew that God slew an animal and offered a blood sacrifice to cover the sins of his parents and even covered their nakedness with the skins of the animals (**Genesis 3:21**). And he presented an offering to God in kind. Cain, however, presented an offering of his own labor and effort. This was not the example that had been set. So no matter how good his intentions, no matter how fresh and clean the offering, no matter how much fruit, vegetables, and grain was offered, it was all evil. Likewise, when we love from our humanity no matter how sincere we are, how often we love, how pure and unadulterated this love is, it is still evil. Only when we love in the manner in which we have been loved by God, only when we follow His example, is it considered to be good, righteous, holy, and acceptable to God.

Consider the words of Jesus in **Matthew 6:23**, "if the light that you think you have is really darkness, imagine how deep that darkness runs." So many people who claim they live in the light and claim to follow God are liars and do not actually know Him because they do not truly love as they have been loved; and that is the point of this whole passage. This takes us back to the whole discussion we had when we studied **Jehovah Mekoddishkem** and distinguished the "called" from the "chosen." I know you have not forgotten those teachings; it was a very difficult series of lessons, but the truth nonetheless. In **John 8:12-13** Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world; he who now and continually follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." I don't mean to scare you, but we must all be confronted with the truth and determine what kingdom we actually live in. Do

you have the Light of life or do you still live by our own light believing that it should be enough for God; after all, you are such a “good” person. Isaiah warns of this fiction when he says:

Isaiah 50:10-11

Who among you fears the Lord and obeys his servant? If you are walking in darkness, without a ray of light, trust in the Lord and rely on your God. But watch out, you who live in your own light and warm yourselves by your own fires. This is the reward you will receive from me: You will soon fall down in great torment.

Again, there is a complete separation between His love and His light and our own love and our own light. There is absolutely nothing in between. His light leads to life and our own light leads to the torment in which many of you now live. His love leads to assurance, stability, and freedom whereas our love leads back around to us and is completely limited by our humanity. Clearly, it is very important for us to come to understand the difference between our human love (which we want so badly to be good and godly) and God’s divine *agape* love. They are different, they don’t ever meet in the middle, the lines are never blurred, and I believe that many of us have no idea the true separation and distinction between the two.

Once again, there is love—His love—and there is hate. The reason for this stark contrast is that everything within the realm of humanity is passing away and is of no eternal value. In comparison, His love is eternal because He is eternal. Therefore, if you are not giving people Jesus—who is love—and they are not experiencing His

love through you, then you in effect hate them (just like Cain) as you are giving them something of no value. In fact, the sad reality is that you actually despise them even though you have convinced yourself you are loving them. If we have His love, then others will know it. “No one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container, or puts it under a bed; but he puts it on a lampstand, so that those who come in may see the light. So take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him (**Luke 8:16; 18**).

Listen carefully. There is God’s love and there is hate. This is not a popular message. It will be rejected by most as offensive, rude, and condescending. What we do in our humanity may make the passage of this life easier, it may spread some joy to others, but again this life is passing away and none of what you do out of your humanity will remain. It will all burn. Only that which He does in and through you will survive the fires of judgment (**1 Corinthians 3:12-15**). All that derives from our humanity, from our *Old Sinful Nature*, is by definition evil, no matter how good it seems. Remember, and do not ever forget, this truth: only God is good. All else is—yes, all else—is therefore not good and is by definition evil. So take care how you listen. Let this truth become your truth. Your love is not His love.

I find it interesting that the Bible seems to always delineate with such stark contrasts; whereas, everything in our mind, emotions, and body wants to find a way to blur the lines and make things not so bad. But that is a fiction of humanity; a lie of the devil; and the one who believes it is himself a liar. This is why the Spirit says in **1 John 2:11** that the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has

blinded his eyes. Think about it. The idea is that they have spent so much time in darkness that their eyes cannot even function in the light, they could not handle the light, and perhaps even their rods and cones have degenerated from being in darkness that even if they wanted to they could not enjoy the light. Instead, they run from the light and stay comfortably wrapped in their own darkness. As a result, they have no idea where they are going.

That is such a powerful picture depicting the true value of human love and goodness. The gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction and because this road is cloaked in darkness people just stumble about on that road often believing they are going in the right direction. In reality, they have no idea where they are going. They are blind. Yet, the strange thing is, they love their darkness. Don't be fooled; people love the wisdom and comfort of their own light.

John 3:16-21

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

This is so sad especially when you consider that this evil Jesus speaks about does not only mean the horrible things men do to one another, but it encompasses all that is not God, all that is not truly good, all that does not derive from the divine—the entire spectrum of human experience. This is why some of the most liberal, tolerant, people who consider themselves to be so good, benevolent, and humanitarian in effect hate God. They think their works are good enough and in so doing they despise the only one who is truly good. They hate the light. In contrast, **1 John 2:10** says that “The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. Did you notice that this address not the external causes for stumbling, which a blind man would clearly fall over, but internal causes of stumbling. In other words, the person who loves with God’s divine *agape* love has clear sight; there is no cause for stumbling in Him because God in His love has gone to war and removed all stumbling blocks. Since the day we were born, God has been wielding the fire and the knife wrenching out of our lives all that is not Him. Hence Jesus statement in **John 3:21**, “he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his **deeds** may be manifested as having been wrought in God” or hammered out by God. In other words, the one who loves has been purified, cleansed, and in Hope truly saved and can now say: I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me. As a result, Jesus works His Father’s deeds in and through them.

All of this reminds me of Jesus words in **John 11:9-10**, “...If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.” Harrowing words

for sure: the light is not in him. Once again, we see the stark contrast between the one who truly lives in the light of Jesus and sees and the one who is blind because the light, Jesus, is not actually in him, even though he is fully convinced of his own love and goodness.

We are going to stop here tonight and next week pick up with what it means to love as we have been loved. Remember, be careful how you listen: for whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him. Are you going to continue to hope that the love of man will be acceptable to God or are you going to hold fast to the truth: only His love is love? Are you going to continue to want to make all things equal or are you going to call that which is good truly good and that which is not good, evil? I want you to think upon these things this week. They will make a foundational difference in how you live and function in this world.

Let's Pray.