

Faith, Hope & Love—Part42

1 John 4:19

We love, because He first loved us.

Last week we covered some pretty difficult territory. I hope you listened carefully, for if you have I believe the power of this little verse will jump off the pages to you. It has the power to transform your view of the pain which you have endured. It has the power to turn your complaint into praise and worship. It has the power to turn your sadness into joy. It has the power to free you to love as you have been loved. We have learned however that the standard of true love is His love. In fact, we have been commanded to love one another as we have been loved by God.

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.

John 15:12

This is My commandment, that you love one another, **just as I have loved you**.

1 John 4:7-8

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

The standard is high. Our love—the love of humanity—cannot compare with God’s *agape* love. In fact, our love is downright evil when compared to His love. It may make us function better in the realm of the kingdom of this world, but it does nothing to advance our lives in the Kingdom of God. There is His love and there is hate. That is the contrast. Just like there is light and darkness and there is no gray; there is righteousness and evil and there is no in between realm of goodness or not-so-badness. This is a hard reality, but it is our spiritual reality nonetheless. And the Lord wants you to simply choose to agree with Him. Accordingly, if we do not love one another with His love we are, in effect, hating one another and are still living, at least in our now, in total darkness. Let’s look at **1 John 4:20-21**.

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 [*and continue to 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 [*and continues to love*] God should love his brother also.

This passage establishes the reality that our human love can never equal God’s

love. The one who hates His brother, which is simply defined as the one who does not love His brother in Christ with God's divine *agape* love, **cannot** now love God with God's divine *agape* love. It is a binary reality. In other words, at any moment of your now, you are either accessing the Spirit within you and love others with God's *agape* love and thereby prove that you love God with the love He has given to you; or you are accessing your *flesh* (even though it may be demonstrated in all manner of human love and goodness) and prove that you do not now love with His love. So it does not matter what you say; and, honestly, it even does not matter what you do. All that matters is the source. Are you accessing the fellowship of His love? Or are you accessing yourself, your love, and are in fellowship with you and you alone? These two sources of love are not equivalent.

This passage also implies that God's love is practically demonstrated and is not some ethereal concept. Hence, the comment about loving or hating a brother in Christ who you can practically see. The idea is that you can know a person's needs and wants and understand how to love them because those needs and wants are readily apparent. And if you cannot make the choice to love them, don't fool yourself into thinking that you love God. You don't. And keep in mind, we are always talking about the source from which your "love" flows, not the particular actions in and of themselves.

To be people who truly abide in the Lord, we are to walk in the same manner as He walked; in fact, it is the only way we know we have truly come to know Jesus (**1 John 2:5-6**). For example, Jesus had plenty of opportunities to do "good" and He did not do them (He only healed one person at the pool of Bethesda). Rather, He only did what His Father told Him to do when His Father told Him to do it. That was

it. Nothing more and nothing less. **John 4:34; 5:30 6:38; 17:4**. Likewise, what we do in true love is by definition always bound and limited by what our Father desires of us at any given moment in time; and this is because it is actually Jesus loving through us, and Jesus still only does what His Father tells Him to do. Do you understand the relationship and how it functions? It all comes down to the *Design Point* set forth in **Galatians 2:20**: Jesus' life in yours doing the Father's will in and through your body.

With that mind, let's start to consider about what it means to **love one another with the love in which we have been loved**. If I think about my relationship with Jesus and how I have been loved, what I can surmise is the following:

- I was chosen. He chose me enabling me to choose Him in return.
- He has always spoken the truth to me. The truth about who I am without Him and who I am with Him. He never protected me from the truth or danced around it just because it was hard. For instance, He never ignored the reality of my brokenness and weakness. Rather, He confronted it (sometimes gently and sometimes quite aggressively) and He demanded that it would have to be dealt with if I was ever going to know and experience His life in mine. He even pinpointed with His spotlight of truth areas deep within my soul which on my own I would have never been aware.
- He never manipulated me; although, He was very discrete and careful regarding what He told me and when He told me.
- Still He never deceived me and never lied to me.
- He gave me the freedom to choose Him in return. He has never forced me to do what He wants. He has never bullied me to do what He wants. In fact, He

has let me completely defy Him and do my own thing.

- Yet, even then, He always protected me from myself and my ridiculous rebellion; and has always kept me safe. He has even gone to great lengths to show me how miserable I am, for real, when I do things my way instead of following His way of wisdom.
- He has always pursued me and pursued me relentlessly even when I did not want Him and would rather be left alone.
- He has never left me. He has always been with me even when I have not wanted to be with Him. He has never forsaken me.
- He has always lived up to His name and has always been true to each and every promise He has ever made.
- He gave up his life for me in total sacrifice. He literally got beaten, had the meat stripped from His body, hung on a cross, and died to be in relationship with me.
- He took responsibility for all my sin and rebellion.
- He took upon Himself the full wrath of the Father for everything I ever did and ever will do.
- He also laid down his life for me by refusing to indulge Himself in any dysfunctional coping mechanisms, He refused to self-protect; He refused to seek His own justice; He refused to submit to fear; He refused to let His pain be a reason why He would not obey the Father; and He refused to make sure I did it right before He would put Himself at such risk.
- He confronted me, He argued with me, He fought for me, He fought against me, and He has always been real with me. He has said some things to me

that hurt really bad and were very hard to handle, but they were needed and they were the truth. Looking back, they were things I am now so thankful He was bold enough and loving enough to speak.

- At the same time He has always comforted me in my affliction and He has stayed His hand of judgment in terms of what I actually deserve.
- He has had mercy on me even when I deserved no mercy.
- In addition, He has always sought out my best interests; not what I thought I wanted or what I hoped for, but what He knew was best for me.
- He provided for me and has ensured that I always have what I need to do everything He has asked of me.
- He has communicated to me constantly. Even when I did not think He was talking to me I found out that it was because I had my head turned away from Him and it is hard to hear Him when I am not looking at His face. But He was always talking to me.
- He has shared with me His wisdom, His thoughts, His mind, and helped me see what He is doing so I can follow Him and do in like manner.
- He has always been extremely intimate with me. He knows me inside and out and He loves me the same. He knows what makes me sad, gives me joy, brings me pleasure; and He loves me to share with Him what I am thinking, what I am feeling, what I hope for, what I dream of, and all that brings me joy. There is no topic that is off limits and nothing I ever say to Him will He consider to be stupid. It all matters to Him because He just delights in experiencing me.
- He has helped me in my travels through the valley of the shadow of death.

- He has held the knife and He has been the one to control the temperature of the fire. He has been the one to wound and cut into me in order to kill every part of me that does not derive from Him. But every wound, every cut, every flicker of flame has all been measured, it has all been timed, and it has all been applied to the exact location to extract and remove the very thing He desired to kill. He was never sloppy or careless.
- He has not been rude to me.
- He has always accepted me. In fact, He said that I am accepted because He loves me and not because of anything I could do for Him. In fact, His desire of me and His acceptance of me has never waned even when I was a horrible human being.
- He did not require me to get it right before He would be my friend and before He would accept me.
- He made me right and continually makes me right in His sight all the time. Thus, I never have to worry about approaching Him or coming to Him. I am always wanted, accepted, and in His eyes worthy.
- He has carefully planned all the events of my life—every teeny, tiny detail, with the one aim of making me like Him. Nothing about my life is random or arbitrary, but it all is in accordance with the wisdom of His divine will.
- He has given me supernatural gifts and abilities to do some really cool things.
- He has even given me Himself so that way I will know the depths of Him.
- He has done this by giving me His Spirit so that I will always know His presence in my life. This is why everywhere I look He is there, deep and wide, near and far—even in my midnight—**Jehovah Shammah** is always there.

- He has delighted in me. He loves watching me enjoy things, work at things, and apply the gifts, talents, and capabilities He gave me.
- He has trained me for battle. He has set up situation after situation where I could trust in Him and be victorious over the enemy.
- He has given me great victories and I have vanquished many of foe.
- He helps me sleep and gives me rest. And at the same time, He has stolen my sleep and given me no rest as He has wrestled with me in the night seeking me to yield to His mastery and Lordship.
- He loves living in me doing His work through me. I am His joy and I am His delight. I am His prize and precious treasure.
- He has given me a family and a home and everything I ever gave up for Him He has returned to me, in some way, shape, for form, in abundance.
- He has given me His word and made me His spokesman.
- He has made me His Signet Ring—His symbol of authority.
- He has made some pretty ostentatious and mind-blowing promises to me.

I think this captures His love for me fairly well; although, I am sure it is woefully incomplete to fully explain the manner in which I have been loved—the manner in which you have been loved. And this sets for us a template, so to speak, of what it means to love as we have been loved. Now don't get me wrong, I am not saying this is a template in terms of some ultimate checklist; rather, I am saying that if you have walked the pathway of death and allowed Jesus to truly possess your soul, if you have embraced Hope in this manner, then He will love though you in a very similar way. And the world will know His love and will be convinced that you are truly a disciple of Jesus.

With that said, you can use this list to look at the quality of your relationships (with both men and women) and compare them to how you have been loved and quickly determine the level of deception and delusion vs. reality you have lived in. It is a quick way to know if you have truly loved one another with God's *agape* love, or if you have just loved one another with your own human love and dressed it up with all the accoutrements of "godliness" and "righteousness" and called it God's love. With this list, you can look at your relationships honestly and determine if you, even now, are still living in darkness and don't know God for real. This kind of love—His *agape* love—is the only proof that we know God for real.

1 John 2:3-5

By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. 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.

And what again is His commandment?

John 15:12

This is My commandment, that you love one another, **just as I have loved you.**

As it says in **2 Corinthians 13:5**, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith;

examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you — unless indeed you fail the test?” The way to recognize if He is in you is if He loves through you in the way you have been loved. Others will know if they experience Jesus through you. You may be able to fool yourself, but in this matter others are not so easily deceived. For example, let’s go back to the issue of our relationships, specifically between men and women, which we talked about weeks ago. I want to address the fear that keeps us from loving each other as we have been loved and experiencing true intimacy in relationship as brothers and sisters in the Lord. Keep in mind what the Lord has told us:

2 Timothy 2:22

Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

This passage should define your attitude toward your relationships with both men and women. And for those people who always accuse us of being separatists and exclusive, I am sorry, but the Word of God is clear. It does not say to pursue these things with people who seek God to get what they want from God. It does not say to pursue these things with people who say they know God but are lying because they don’t love with His love. It does not say to pursue these things with people who say they worship God but live as if they are their own God. It says, quite particularly (and I want you to be careful how you listen): pursue righteousness, faith, *agape* love and peace, with those who, in their now, dig down deep in their

soul and call, and continue to call, on the Lord from a pure heart (it is rendered in the *present middle participle*). And there is no gender, age, race, ethnicity, economic status, prior relationship, marriage, or dating, limitation on this command to pursue God in this way; it is all inclusive.

With that said, there is no doubt that whenever you cross men and women there is the possibility of confusion, entanglement, romance, and even lustful indulgence. Especially given the reality that the number one correlating factor for people who fall in love is proximity. Surprisingly, falling in love is not driven first and foremost by personality, looks, humor, or anything like that (although that obviously plays into it), but merely spending quality time together. Notwithstanding those obvious issues and concerns, what I do know is that if you base your decisions about who you are in relationship with and what that relationship is to look like on fear instead of faith, they will always produce the opposite of what you hope. If you try and control your behavior because of your fear, it will always trap you in a prison of the *flesh*. It may be the prison of hidden lust played out in pornography, some other sick dysfunctional coping mechanism, or even in religious legalism, but don't think for a moment that you are more powerful than your fear. If you choose fear over faith, fear will be your master; and we have studied quite in depth what fear produces in our lives, and it is the furthest thing from God's love. After all, fear is the antonym of faith. Moreover, just because you know how to wrap up your own love in all manner of Christian goodness and convince yourself that you are doing good, it still is inadequate and unacceptable to God. Only when we love with His *agape* love, in the manner in which we have been loved, is it good. You must ask yourself, what kind of love defines your relationships with both men and women?

With that aside, let's talk practically about what you do when emotions don't cooperate, the desires of your body don't cooperate, and even your thoughts run to and fro like sex-crazed maniacs. **2 Timothy 2:22**, kind of sums it up. We are told to flee from youthful lusts. It is a command for every moment of our now (*present active imperative*). However, we don't flee by separating ourselves from people, from trying to protect them from ourselves, by implementing fear based rules to try and manage and control interactions. That is not faith. **2 Timothy 2:22** can't be obeyed if you are not in relationship. Besides, the answer has been provided for us.

First, realize that all the craziness is just emotion and not something you have to act on or believe is truth. You know how it is; you think you love this person and then you start hanging with someone else and you think you love that person. Your emotions are not reliable. They are fickle and temperamental. If you make decisions based on what you feel, you will end up trapped in relationships which God never desired. And believe me, I know, that is the worst kind of prison.

Second, by faith, make the choice to **pursue** righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. In fact we are commanded to pursue these things, every moment of our now (*present active imperative*), with one another and not run away from one another just because our emotions and our body is going crazy on us. I believe that if we, by faith, pursue these things together it will be a natural restraint on the craziness of our emotions and the insanity within our body; because when you legitimately pursue Jesus with others, His nature is so consuming. Let's consider what it means to pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace with one another.

If we pursue righteousness with others who call on the Lord from a pure heart,

we will know that our own goodness and methods of control are pathetic and worthless and will throw them out. We will know we are desperately in need for Jesus to be our righteousness. After all, our mind and emotions will condemn us for all the crazy thoughts we have at any given point in time and we will be unable, on our own, to stop them. No amount of control will work. Therefore, we are to get up every day and put on and continue to put on His righteousness (***Ephesians 6:14***) confident that He is our perfection and He has made us right and continually makes us right with Him (***Romans 5:1***). Therefore, we can pursue relationships with men or women from a pure heart and not a heart that is seeking its own desire and its own lustful pleasure.

If we pursue faith with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart, together we can bet our lives on the truth that God has provided for us everything we need for life and godliness through the true knowledge of Jesus Christ (***2 Peter 1:3***). Therefore, we don't need a woman or a man to make us whole and complete. It might be nice and a lot of fun, but it will never complete us nor be the panacea the world has convinced us it is. In fact, I believe the Lord will never give us anything that brings us more pleasure than Him; and I say that because I am confident nothing in this earth and no one can bring us more joy or pleasure than He can. After all, in His presence is the fullness of joy and at His right hand are pleasures forever more (***Psalms 16:11***). You can only imagine what He can do with just His little finger. Moreover, we can bet our lives on the fact that He is a jealous God—**Jehovah Qanna**—and He wants us to put nothing before Him ever.

If we pursue *agape* love with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart, then we will be filled with the living Hope that He will save us from ourselves and make

us like Him. In fact, we will seek God to bring forth the fire and the knife knowing that we must die in order for Him to take up full residence in our souls. And His possession of our being is the only way we will be able to be vessels of His divine *agape* love. We can encourage each other to die to those places in our mind, our emotions, and our body that still think we know better than God what we need and when we need it. We can walk together through the valley of the shadow of death knowing that on the other side is life and His love. We can help each other face our pain and reconcile it to the love of God so we do not drown in fear and allow fear to be our master. To pursue love we must pursue death to all within us that is not Him. It is so much easier to do this together than trying to man-up or woman-up and do it alone.

If we pursue peace, then we will pursue the one who is peace, as opposed to a woman or man who we think will be the secret to finding peace in our soul. In **John 14:27** Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful." We don't have to be worried that He is not going to provide for us; we don't have to be fearful. Resting in His promise of peace, we can pursue Jesus, and not romance, and experience deep intimacy and *koinonia* fellowship. It will be so satisfying as we experience Jesus through one another. We will pursue a right relationship with one another; which is what it means to live in peace. We are to trust that in His timing, if it is His will, God will provide us the romance we desire. Further, we can trust that He will speak to us about these things. We can help each other be willing to wait and listen. Most people who run toward romance, always appropriately dressed up with "God told me to," are usually striving to find what they have not yet found in

Him. They reach for romance because they are avoiding death knowing what it will take to become a man or a woman who loves others in the way God has loved them. Thus, if we truly pursue peace, we will first and foremost be pursuing Jesus for one another and we will pursue His dominant reign over our lives.

I have to say, all the rules we have constructed and all our fears have kept us from experiencing intimacy in relationship and it has killed us believers; and it has done nothing to convince the world that we are true disciples of Jesus Christ. If anything, they just think we are control freaks and crazy. I understand many people have blown it with sex and romance and so we build rules and cloak ourselves in fear and implement all sorts of controls so we won't be one of those people who get busted. But such things are not the ways of God; they are the ways of fear and the devil. The ways of God are always found in relationship, which is why He commands us to love one another as we have been loved. Most people who have spent years in the religion of Christianity might think this sounds wrong, blasphemous, unwise, and dangerous even. But then you have to stop and ask, who is your master? If it is fear, then you will only produce fruits of your *flesh*, even all manner of religious *flesh*—but *flesh* nonetheless. If however your master is the Lord, then you have to be willing to bet your life on who He is and who you are in Him (otherwise you are not pursuing faith). You have to be willing to choose to live by faith knowing that without faith it is impossible to please God (**Hebrews 11:6**).

Faith, hope, and love. These are the building blocks to the kingdom of God. Fear and control are the building block upon which the kingdom of this world rests. You get to choose which path you follow, but remember the standard. We must love one another **as we have been loved**. This means we must be in relationship, we

must truly know one another, we must care for one another, and we must be willing to give ourselves to one another in His love. Let us be men and women of faith and let's leave our fear behind and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. The intimacy that swells from these kinds of relationships will truly satisfy because you will experience Jesus in and through one another. It will be beautiful, it will be a spectacle for all to see, and it will be glorious. And Jesus is always satisfying for in Him we live, and move, and exist. This is why He says whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.

Let's Pray