

Love Perfected

1st John 4:12-5:5

Responsive Reading Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Leviticus 19:1-18

Matthew 22:23-40

Last week we looked at the first 11 verses of Chapter 4 here, mainly focused and built upon the first verse where John says that we are not to believe every spirit but the test the spirits to make sure they are of God, because there are many false prophets who have gone into the world. The realization here that John is telling us to judge those who are claiming Christ to be sure their faith is true is quite obvious and that was the main focus of our time spent here in these verses last week.

Then we see in the following 7 verses John lays out his tests of true faith again. Verses 2-3 we see the test of correct doctrine, that Jesus is the Messiah who has come in the flesh, 4-6 I think points to the obedience of God's children, they will listen, and heed the teaching of the apostles through whom God has chosen to make his will known to us through scripture. We see this in Verse 6, We are of God, He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

God's true children will adhere to, and abide in the teaching of scripture. For That which the apostles taught is the very inspired word of God. Those who are of God, will hear, and will do what the apostles have taught. Those who are not, do not hear, and do not do that which the apostle have taught because they are not of God, but are of the world.. So we see the test of Obedience found in verse 4-6.

And lastly here we see the test of Love in verse 7-12. verse 7, he says” Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8.He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” If we are claiming Christ, if we claim to know God, but have not love then according to John here that claim is false. For you can not love God, and harbor bitterness and anger toward others who God has chosen, for the same God who works in them salvation, conviction and love is the same who works in you.

This love also works outside of the fellowship of the saints, for we see in verse 9. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that HE loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. This very love that God showed toward us as sinners, as enemies, is the same that works in us to show love toward those who are outside the faith.

This is our calling, Christ is not only our savior, but also our perfect example. That is why Paul can say in Galatians, and James said in his book that all of the law is fulfilled in this: That you love your neighbor as yourself. When we went through James I pointed out that this kind of love, this self giving love not only to just your friends and family, but to strangers is impossible for mankind to truly practice. Sure, people can be benevolent, they can appear to be loving and generous but unless done by the enabling love of our Savior the basis and motive is pride, or even greed and is not truly the selfless love that the scripture talks about.

That is how John uses love as a test of true faith. He defined this love in chapter 3:16. By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. If Christ laid down his life for those who hated him, we should be able to show love toward

fellow Christians, and others who come into our life. In short, with this test of Love, If you do not have this kind of love, Then it is a fair bet that you also do not have the love of God in you.

So John goes on to say in verse 12 here in chapter 4. No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His spirit.

This is a repeat of what John had already said in chapter 3, verse 24. Now he who keeps his commandments abides in Him, and He in him, and by this we know that He abides in us, by the spirit whom He has given us. No one has seen God, but we know that God abides in us if we keep his commandments, and what commandment of God's is the greatest commandment?

We read it this morning, Christ told the lawyer who ask what is the greatest commandment in the law, he said "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it; You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all of the law and the prophets.

Everything is linked together, everything flows together and is a part of the whole. You can not have love, without obeying God's commandments, for the greatest of these commandments is to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, yet you can't obey God commandments unless you have first been resurrected with Christ from death in sin, to a new life in his blood. So often we see so much emphasis put on God's love, and yet neglect his holiness, and obedience to his commands. Or we see others who focus heavily on keeping God's commands, yet forget the greatest commandments, they love God, but do not always show much of love toward one another. All of these things fit together to form a beautiful mosaic of true faith and life with in the Christian. It is Faith, and love working working together through obedience to the Father.

In the next following verse we see that John lays out a series of truths that create a golden chain that should bind our hearts and minds in assurance of our faith. Verse 13, By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. This verse can be understood in 2 ways I think, and I think you could say that both of them are correct. I think that when John says we here in this verse because of the context of the following verses I think he is referring to the apostles. In the gospel of John, 14:26 Jesus tells his Disciples that soon he will be leaving, but the helper, the holy spirit that God will send will teach them all things, and bring to remembrance the teachings of Jesus. But there is also the element that this holds true to us individually also. The Holy spirit ministers to our spirit also, teaching us, and bringing scripture to our minds. so I think this verse equally applies to us individually as well.

But as we see in the following verse John says, And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. This is why I think John is actually referring to himself and the apostles in verse 13 because none of us have seen Jesus, but he and the other apostles have. They have seen, and they have witnessed Christs ministry, his life, his death, and his resurrection. That is exactly how he started this letter, verse 1, that which is from the beginning we have heard, and we have seen with our own eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled concerning Christ.

So the first 2 links to this chain of assurance is first, the Holy Spirit, who ministers to us, as it did to the Apostles, which is the 2nd link, They have seen, heard, and touched the messiah, and bear witness to both his deity and his humanity and they testify that God has sent his Son to be the savior of the world.

The 3rd link we see here, is in verse 15. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. This 3rd link is us, This is the same as he said before in chapter 1 about being in fellowship with each other, through the son, and the father.

The Holy spirit ministered to the Apostles, who saw Christ and proclaimed the gospel message so that who ever hears them and confesses Christ abides in God, they are in the fellowship of the Apostles, and every one else who confesses the same. The out word proof that flows from this is the love and obedience to Christ, who is working in us to love and care for each other.

We see this theme of love circled back around again in verse 16, tied back into all of this again. We know we abide in Christ because of the Holy Spirit in us, because we believe upon Jesus Christ as our savior, then verse 16, and we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. In this we find 2 very basic principles of the Gospel. God is love, and those who abide in God will love, because the God of Love abides in them.

John continues on in verse 17 here, using love not as a test of faith here, but as assurance of that faith. Love has been perfected among us in this; That we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. As we grow and mature in the faith, and in our love toward our father, and toward each other we will be able to have confidence in the day of judgment for we have assurance that our faith has been tested and found to be true. Knowing that just as He was, so are we. Hated by the world, but loved by those in the fellowship of God.

This love that works in us assurance, also casts out fear, verse 18. there is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. You can not have both assurance of faith, and fear of the judgment. So many people fear death, they fear what comes after. Some like to suppress that fear by deceiving themselves that there is nothing after death, but yet there is always that nagging thought in the back of their mind, what if they are wrong. But for those who God loves, we should not have this fear. Sure, there is an element of anxiety attached to death because for us it is the great unknown, but we have the promises of God that his children will inherit the promised land, and will be with him in the next life.

This perfect love of God, casts out our fear of death. We may be a bit anxious of the physical aspect of dying, but we are not afraid of the eternal state of our souls. The last half of this verse, 18 says But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. The commentaries I looked at did not really talk about this last half of the verse much, and one I read said that if we are afraid of the judgment that just means we must grow more in love. I don't think that I agree with that statement, and I think rather this is John again laying forth a test of faith through love. If the Love of God is perfected in you, you may come with boldness in the day of judgment because you know that your life is hidden in Christ.

But if you fear the judgment, if you fear death, then the perfect love of God is not in you. We can not love God, and fear the judgment of God because judgment has to do with punishment and we have been saved from the wrath to come. We are loved by God, we are his children, we need not fear his punishment for sin because Christ has paid the penalty for us on the cross.

And our love toward God, and our brothers and sisters ministers this assurance to us, because as verse 19 says We love Him, because He first loved us. We need not fear judgment, we need not fear punishment because God first loved us, and our love toward him and each other shows God's love in us,

Knowing how rich God's sovereign love toward us is, only works to deepen our love toward him. All who have experienced this forgiving, gracious sovereign love know this to be true. And the mark of this is our love toward each other.

John returns again here in verse 20 showing the importance of loving our brothers and sisters in Christ. This is not just something that we do because we feel it is what we are suppose to do, we do because it is who we are. This perfected love of God works through us and shows through in the community around us, if it does not then according to John you are a liar.

John has made quite a few of these types of statements we have seen, Chapter 1:10 he said if we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us. 2:4, Whoever says I know him, but does not keep his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him. 2:22, Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ, This is the anti-christ, he who denies the father and the son, and here in verse 20 he says, if someone says I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar.

John makes it quite clear that the love for the fellowship of God is central to true faith. He goes on to say, for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? Words are empty if not followed by meaningful action. You can claim to love God all you want, and in fact it can be a pretty simple thing to claim because how can anyone judge if you do or not, John says that we can know if someone loves God whom they have not seen if they love those around them who they have seen.

And as if that was not enough, John adds here in verse 21, saying that loving our brothers and sisters in Christ is not just a good thing to do, or a right thing to strive for, but that it is a commandment that we have heard from Christ himself, that he who loves God loves his brother also. John Calvin put it this way. "It is a false boast when anyone says that he loves God but neglects his image which is before his eyes."

The implications of this love toward each other which as we have seen is central to our faith and our christian walk. Is that we can not do this on our own. John is not telling us that we can be an island, that we can claim Christ, that we can claim to love God and not be in fellowship with others. This idea we have today that we belong to the universal church of Christ and we don't need to attend or be a part of a local body does not work here at all. In other words, Christians must be in fellowship with other Christians,

We can not do this from our boat, or our couches, or the beach, we must gather together, to worship, to learn, to grow, and to hold each other accountable to scripture. This love that we are commanded to have toward each other does not work out, and can not be true unless we gather, unless we are involved. Once again, you can't claim to love the brothers and sisters in Christ if you are not with them, around them, and involved in their lives, otherwise it is just empty words.

Verse 1 of chapter 5, Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of him. Blake White says "What this means in practical terms is that Christians must make the members of their local church a priority. We must be involved in each others lives, do we pray for each other, do we seek to serve each other, do we make our church family a priority in our life? The local church body is made up of the children of God, you can not love God and forsake the body. Our love of God is expressed in our love toward the local body of believers. That is why gathering together, and fellowship with one another and being involved in

each others lives is so important and it is why you can not claim to love Christ and forsake the gathering the local body of believers.

This even has implications in our giving. Some make a practice of giving to large world wide organizations instead of the local body. According to this teaching here, this actually is wrong. Not that giving to these organizations itself is wrong, but when it becomes your tithe, and you forsake the local body then it is wrong. You are not loving the local gathering of believers as you ought if you are withholding our financial support from them.

It all comes down to the command to love as Christ loved us. We can't do that if we forsake the gathering together in the local body, we are not expressing that love to our local brothers and sisters if we are withholding that which God has given us. We see this in the following verses here.

Verse 2, John repeats himself again and says By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments, for this is the love of God that we keep his commandments and his commandments are not burdensome. This love is not an emotion, it is practical, and has action. We can easily say we Love God, and that we are a part of the universal church, but unless that is expressed in action they are empty words. And those words can not be expressed in action if we are not involved in a local gathering of believers.

In closing here, these last verses, we see more encouragement from John, Verse 4, he says For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world- our faith. We who are born of God have overcome the worldly tendency to satisfy our sinful desires because we have victory in Christ through our faith which works out in obedience and love toward God.

Each of these things builds upon the next and comes back around again to God's love for us. It starts, and ends with God's love. I think of it as a circle, starting at the top with God's Love, Christ's love and obedience even to the death on the cross, the Apostles witness, our obedience and faith, then our love toward God and each other because of God's love toward us, God's love toward us is shown by the sending of his Son to die in our stead, which was witnessed and recorded by the apostles so that we may know and follow in faith and obedience with love to our father who first loved us, and around and around it goes. Love of the father, love of his Son, love toward one another, perfect eternal love made complete in us. Love Perfected in us who abide in him.