

**Love made complete**

16/2/20 dkm

Read: Matthew 22:23-46, 1John 4:12-21

Text: 1John 4:17-21

Psalms: 25:1-7, 57:1-3&amp;9-11, 71:11-20a, 117

‘What is the greatest commandment in the law?’ a smart Pharisee asked Jesus. Without hesitation, Jesus answered him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God’ (Mat 22:36-40). The Pharisee probably thought, ‘That is easy. I love God. That is why I keep the law, why I go to the temple, why I fast and tithe. Everyone can see that I love God’. But Jesus added, ‘with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your soul’. He told this man he must love God with all his being and all he had, not just in the performance of religious rituals. The Pharisee might have thought he could tell people he loved God because, after all, no one sees God so how would they know? It was of course the Son of God he was talking to, but he did not believe this.

Jesus went on, ‘And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbour as yourself’. Like the lawyer, he might have asked Jesus, ‘Who is my neighbour?’ ‘Oh, you mean I even have to love Samaritans?’ ‘That is taking love a bit too far’ he might have thought, ‘My duty is to keep the commandments, not to be loving people’. But Jesus said this was a commandment; indeed the two greatest commandments were these commandments to love, to love God and love your neighbour. So what is love? Sadly, this Pharisee failed to see the love of God standing before him. He failed to see that God is love, and that he showed his love in sending his only begotten Son to die for him. ‘This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us’ (3:16 NIV).

The apostle John heard what Jesus said to the Pharisee. He also saw Jesus die on the cross. John saw and believed, and he wrote a gospel as well as these letters, ‘that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name’ (John 20:31). The life that we have in his name is a life of

abiding in God and he in us, a life of joy to the full, a life of love, of God's love being perfected or made complete in us.

Many are still asking, 'What is the greatest commandment', and 'Who is my neighbour'. Christians tend to make their own decisions on such matters rather than listen to what Jesus says. They take their concept of love from the world rather than from the Bible. The world limits love to giving bread to the poor; it is good to help the poor but I said 'limit' love to this. Jesus tells us that God is love and we are to love other people as he loved us. Jesus did not come into this world to simply to feed the poor.

Back in verse 12 of this chapter John wrote, 'If we love one another, God abides in us and his love has been perfected in us'. John goes on to explain 'abiding in God, and he in us' in verses 13-16. In verses 17-21 he explains the perfection of God's love in us: 'Love has been perfected among us in this' where 'perfected' can be translated 'made complete' or 'fulfilled' (4:17- the KJV translation 'Herein is our love made perfect' is not correct). John points out that there is no fear in love, and no hate in love.

### **1. No fear in love**

When God's love is seen in our love for one another then it is made complete. As Stott writes, 'God's love is seen in our love'. Without reading the Bible and without eyes of faith, people cannot see God's love. This they must do in order to be saved, but their initial view of God's love may well be what they see in you. When we helped a poor woman get her dying baby to hospital she saw the love of God in us. We prayed to Jesus to save this baby, and he did. She turned from her Hindu gods to believe in Jesus. Too often we fail, but we keep alert to opportunities of showing God's love through good deeds.

Apart from our actions, we show God's love in our reactions, in the way we respond to criticism and to trials. Although not directly

addressing God's love, James writes of being patient in times of trial, 'that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing' (James 1:4). This is the same 'perfection' that John writes of. We all face difficulties in life- there is no trial that is not common to man (1Cor 10:13); what matters to God is how we respond. Do we respond as one who is in fellowship with the all-powerful God who is love, or as one who trusts in himself or herself?

The greatest fear most people have is that of death and judgment. When we do something wrong we fear punishment. Death is the ultimate judgment for sin; all sin is against God. However hard people try to hide their fear of death and judgment, it is there in every heart, except the heart that knows and loves God. The Bible tells us that after death comes the judgment- and no one can tell us anything different! (Heb 9:27). John knows there will be day when this world comes to an end, a day when Jesus returns in judgment. But he tells us that we can have confidence at his coming (2:28), and that 'perfected love' has boldness or confidence in the Day of Judgment (4:17). Every person who has ever lived will have to give account to Jesus the Judge, but John assures us that those in whom God's love is made complete have nothing to fear on this day. Are you such a person?

'Because as He is, so are we in this world' (4:17). What does John mean? 'In this world we are like Jesus' is the NIV translation. But how are we like Jesus? Jesus faced every trial and temptation that we might face in this world (Heb 4:16), but is this what John means? An uncle recently gave me a set of commentaries/sermons by H.A. Ironside (d.1951). Ironside struggled with these words, as I did, until looking at them in the context, the context of judgment. He writes, 'Is He ever coming into judgment? Oh, no. Has He ever been there? Yes. When? When he died on Calvary for my sin. That was judgment day. Christ settled everything for me that day, and now God has raised Him from the dead and taken Him to his own right hand... As he is in relation to judgment so are we in this world'. This is truly

amazing! Love, God's love has been perfected in us here in this world.

'There is no fear in love because perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment/punishment' (4:18). These beautiful words are well known, but they are more than just beautiful words. This is a wonderful truth but we do need to keep it in context. It does not refer to fear of heights or of dark places, apart from the dark place of death! The context is that of relationships and of punishment, in particular eternal punishment. Speaking of relationships, one man writes, 'To know we are safe and secure is an absolute treasure. We enjoy that kind of peace only in the most blessed of human relationships. If we have that with parents, a spouse, siblings, or friends, then we should be most thankful. In a fallen world there is fear interlaced with almost every relationship'. I think of a woman who once worshipped with us; when I suggested she get married to the man she had been living with for twenty years she spoke of fear that he might leave her- which he could do without breaking any vow or law while they were not legally married! In fact, they were breaking the law of God in not being married, but she, like many, did not understand this.

'There is no fear in love'. This is *agape* love. This is Christ-like love. This is love that comes from God because God is love. This is love that you know when you confess your sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the love you appreciate, knowing that Jesus has taken the punishment hanging over your head because of your sin. So while the unbeliever lives in fear of death and punishment, you who believe no longer fear. We no longer fear the unknown because there is no unknown when we know God and his love. Being in fellowship with God through Jesus Christ we can pray to him with the assurance that he hears us and is able to help us- note the word 'confidence' appearing again in this reference to prayer (3:22, 5:14).

Our witness to the world will be the patience and confidence we demonstrate in times of difficulty. We will be showing the love of God perfected in us, to people around us. Are you being such a witness, a witness in your actions of love, and in your reactions of 'love made perfect in us'? Before moving to our next point, note that John is not writing about 'reverence for God' that Scripture means by the term 'the fear of God'; even Jesus offered up prayers and petitions and 'was heard because of his godly fear' (Heb 5:7). John is writing about fear of punishment or judgment.

## **2. No hate in love**

Love is completely incompatible with hate. Love is more powerful than fear or hate. God's love is supremely powerful. In telling us that we are more than conquerors through Jesus who loved us, the apostle Paul goes on to speak of powerful things like death, like angels, or any other power in the universe, being unable to 'separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom 8:39). We must never forget that it is God's love for us that came first, and that powerfully keeps us every day of our lives, and not our love for God. John again tells us, 'We love because he first loved us' (4:19 cf. 4:10 NIV). Moreover, God's love does not change; God's steadfast love never fails. We do not live like the lady fearing that her husband might leave her at any time!

If we truly know God's love for us we will reflect it in our love, not only for God but in love for one another. The two love commands cannot be separated. "If someone says, 'I love God' and hates his brother, he is a liar" (4:20). There are no 'ifs' or 'buts' or exceptions with John. We cannot say we love certain brothers or sisters and not others. God has one family and one only. This is one body called the church and Jesus is the head.

Back in chapter 2 John said that hating a brother means walking in darkness (2:11). He later said that those who hate a brother are children of Satan and abide in death (3:10). Now he uses even

stronger language, calling such people 'liars' because we cannot love and hate at the same time. James speaks of the impossibility of getting fresh and salt water from the same tap (James 3:11). In the same way, we cannot get love and hate from the same heart. If we think we can love God, or say we love God, while hating or failing to love others, we are lying to ourselves, to others, and to God.

John reminds us of what he said in verse 12 about not seeing God. We might think it is easier to love God who is unseen than to love fellow believers whom we see- often 'warts and all', as we say. But John says this is not possible: 'Anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen' (4:20 NIV). You may have heard people say they would go to church if it wasn't for the people who are there. They say the people in church are hypocrites, but they are actually calling themselves liars, according to John. Calvin succinctly writes, 'It is a false boast when anyone says he loves God but neglects His image which is before his eyes'. Moreover, if I fail to love even an objectionable brother or sister it means I have forgotten the love with which God first loved an objectionable person called 'Me'.

In closing, John takes us to the love commandments given by Jesus, the place where we started. In giving these two love commandments, Jesus effectively summarised the Ten Commandments. John's summary is even more succinct: 'He who loves God must love his brother also' (4:21). When it comes to loving God, there is not fear in love. We call God, 'Abba, Father' because of the Spirit of adoption within us (4:13, Rom 8:15). We are not slaves who fear a master; we are sons who love our Father (3:1, John 15:15).

As children of God we enjoy fellowship with Him, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and we also come into fellowship with one another (1:3). To reject this fellowship is to seriously misunderstand the fellowship we have with God. To say we love God but hate a brother or sister in

Christ demonstrates complete and utter dishonesty. Perfected or complete love means love towards God, and love towards any and every brother or sister in Christ. We love because he first loved us.