

HEREIN IS LOVE

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us . . . “ (1 Jn 4:10)

THE SIMPLICITY OF THE GOSPEL

Paul wrote to the Corinthians about his fear that they would be led away from the “simplicity” of the Gospel (2 Cor. 11:3). When we intellectualize the Gospel we can rob the cross of its power. Paul preached, but not with “wisdom of words” less the cross of Christ me made of none effect. (1 Cor. 1:17).

I. Howard Marshall in his commentary on 1 John makes these cogent remarks about the simplicity of his message: *“The student of the Greek New Testament is also well advised to begin his reading with these Epistles. Their Greek is the easiest to read in the whole of the New Testament. The total vocabulary of the New Testament is 5,437 words; the number of different words used in 1 - 3 John is merely 303, and the majority of these are common words. To read a text with such a small vocabulary is a light undertaking. The general style and syntax of the Epistles is also simple and straightforward, and there are not many tricky passages to retard the beginner . . .”* (Commentary on the Epistles of John, p. 2)

Common sense tells us that for anything to be used by masses around the world it has to be simple. We are among the best educated and most sophisticated people on earth and we don't like to read instructions. We have a well knowing saying: “When all else fails . . .” and you know the rest.

Please consider these broad concepts used by John in this short letter.

- 1: 1-3 The incarnation - It is better to have a guide than a map.
- 2:2 - Jesus is our “propitiation” or “atoning sacrifice.” So many millions of sacrifices had been made that virtually everyone was familiar with the concept.
- 2:20, 27 - The idea of anointing is also something that most can relate to. Prophets, priests, and kings were anointed in Old Testament times. Those who were anointed by God were special. Consider, for example, the anointing of King David. He was an ordinary man until he was anointed. There is something powerful about the idea that God has a plan for your life and will help you fulfill it.
- Being born again is mentioned at least 6 times in 1 Jn. This too is a common concept in the world.
- Love - the central theme of all the Bible is mentioned no less than 46 times in 1 John. In the KJV we find love - 33 times, loveth - 9 times, loved - 4 times.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LOVE

ALL TRUTHS ARE EQUALLY TRUE - BUT NOT ALL TRUTHS ARE EQUALLY IMPORTANT.

There were 10 commandments written in stone, and over 600 other commandments in the books of Moses. When Jesus was asked which of these commandments was the most important He did not equivocate. Neither did He teach that all of the commandments were of equal importance. He said that all of the Law and the Prophets could be summarized in only 2 commandments and both of them involved love.

Heb. 11:6 reminds us that without faith it is impossible to please God. You know, however, that even though faith is essential to salvation love is more important. “Now abideth faith, hope, and love, these three, but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13).

The priority of love is the very essence of God's nature, the central theme of the whole Bible, and the very essence of Christianity. Jesus said it like this: “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another” (Jn. 13:35).

In the context of this passage John informs us by inspiration that:

- Love comes from God. (v. 7)
 - Love comes from being born of God (v. 7)
 - God showed His love by sending Jesus that we might live through Him (v. 9)
 - His Love is understood, not because we love God but because He loved us (v. 10)
- 1 Jn. 4:19 states it succinctly **“We love him, because he first loved us.”**

ORIGINAL THOUGHT

Philosophers debate whether it is possible for man to have an original thought. The thoughts that we think are original, invariably have historical roots. Some years ago scientists claimed to have created life in a test tube. Of course they didn't! All they did was take something God had already created and experiment with it. To state the same truth in another way, if you are going to create a man from the dust of the earth, you need to come up with your own dust.

I think the same thing is true of ideas. Every time man claims to have invented something, or come up with an original thought, more careful study reveals a counterpart in something God has already created. For example:

- Man claims to have invented radar, but bats, dolphins, and many other creatures have been using radar for thousands of years.
- Man claims to have invented cameras, television, etc. but the human eye was taking pictures and transferring them to the brain thousands of years before man made a camera or a television set.
- Millions of birds and butterflies migrated with incredible accuracy thousands of years before man came up with a G.P.S. or celestial navigation.

In the text before us, however, we do not have to resort to philosophy or speculation to discover how mankind learns to love. The text is explicit. **“We love him, because he first loved us”**. Our love originated with God.

DISCIPLESHIP

John begins this letter with the reminder that he had seen Jesus with his own eyes, heard him with his own ears, and even touched Him with his own hands. No man had ever seen God at any time, but God sent Jesus to “explain” God. Jesus demonstrated and fleshed out the love of God. He left us an example that we should follow in His steps. His primary command to John, and the other disciples was “follow me”. W. E. Vine states that 77 times in the four Gospels Jesus said to His disciples “follow me”. Only once is the word “akoloutheo” used of following anyone other than Jesus. (Mk. 14:13). **“A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.” (Luke 6:40NIV)**

In addition to following Jesus we are also to imitate Him. Note for example Eph. 5:1: **“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour.”** The Bible word translated as “followers” in this passage is the Greek word “mimetes” from which we get our English word “mimic”. So we are not just to follow Jesus in a generic sense, but we are also to “mimic” or “imitate” His actions.

Imitation love, however, is not always a good thing. When Israel, for example, merely went through the motions of loving God, the Lord accused them of spiritual adultery. They “mimicked” love. They went through the motions of loving God, much like a prostitute goes through the motions of making love. Even though Israel drew near to God at the Tabernacle or Temple, their

hearts were far from Him. Spiritual adultery, as you know, was a constant theme of the prophets. Isaiah mentioned it in Is. 57:3. Jeremiah mentioned it in Jer. 3:8, 9. Ezekiel mentioned it in Ez. 16:20. This is the central theme of the Prophet Hosea. His wife went through the motions of making love to him, but she really didn't love him.

So, our relationship with God must involve the heart. It must be deeper than merely mimicking the conduct of Christ. True love, as you know, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. There is a great difference between an artificial apple and the real thing. Man can make an artificial fruit, only God can make real fruit. Galatians 5:22 is quite clear: "The fruit of the Spirit is love". Man can make imitation love, but true love only comes from God.

JESUS DID NOT LEAVE US LIKE ORPHANS

Even though Jesus went to heaven where we cannot follow Him now (Jn. 13:36), He still did not abandon us or leave us like orphans (Jn. 14:18). This time, however, Jesus would not guide us from without, but from within. We are not "conformed" we are "transformed". In John 14:23 Jesus promised that He and the Father would come and make a home within us. When you receive Jesus into your heart you are born again. As a point of interest, here are six things 1 John promises to those who are born of God.

- 2:29 - those born of God do what is right.
- 3:9 - those born of God do not continue in sin.
- 4:7 - those born of God love one another.
- 5:1 - those born of God love others who are born of God.
- 5:4 - those born of God overcomes the world.
- 5:18 - those born of God does not continue to sin for God keeps him safe and the evil one cannot harm him.

Just as physical life is replicated by means of seeds, so also is spiritual life. We received our physical DNA from Adam, and our spiritual DNA from Jesus. As we have born the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly (1 Cor. 15:49).

GOD

Let us begin our study with God. He existed before creation and all of reality emanates from Him. God does not profess love in some shallow and superficial way, it is the very essence of His being. This concept, as you know, is stated many times in Scripture. Note, for example, the way that God and love literally saturate the chapter we are studying. **"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit . . ."** (1 Jn 4:7-13).

JESUS

God is a Spirit and as such cannot be seen with human eyes. The Bible states unequivocally that no man has seen God at any time (Jn. 1:18). Therefore God became flesh that we might understand His nature. Jesus became the "Word" of God. A word is a vehicle of communication. Jesus is the vehicle of communication that bridges the gap between God and man. **"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of**

the Father, he hath declared him.” (John 1:18) The Bible word translated as “declared” is “exegeomai” from which we get our English word “exegete”. Jesus “exegetes” or “explains” God.

The Law, by contrast, does not exegete the nature of God. It is like a shadow. Note this contrast - Heb. 10:1 states that the Law had a shadow of things to come and not reality - James 1:17 states that God is the Father of Lights without a shadow. You cannot get an accurate picture of anyone or anything from a shadow. Jesus, however, is the Light of the world (John 8:12).

Jesus is the very personification of God and also of love. In fact, the two are so closely associated that someone has taken the liberty of quoting 1 Cor. 13 like this: “Jesus is patient, Jesus is kind. Jesus does not envy or boast. Jesus is not proud, or rude, or self seeking. Jesus is not easily angered and keeps no records of wrongs. Jesus does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. Jesus always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Jesus never fails!”

THE HOLY SPIRIT

The word “trinity”, as you know, is not found in the Bible. The Bible word used to describe the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is “Godhead”. That word appears 3 times in the KJV of the Bible.

- Acts 17:23 - “ **Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device.” (Acts 17:29)** Paul, speaking on Mars Hill, reminded his listeners that the nature of God is too great and profound to be produced by the hands of men. We might also add, that our “Infinite God” is also beyond the mental abilities of the finite mind. We cannot create the likeness of God either physically or philosophically.
- The second use of Godhead is found in Rom. 1:20: “**For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:” (Rom 1:20)**
 - Two things about God are “clearly seen” from creation. First, His “eternal power”. Almost everyone is familiar with power. Nothing happens without it. The power that we are familiar with, however, is constantly running down. Scientists refer to this truth as the second law of thermodynamics. There is no such thing as perpetual motion. Every mechanism with which we are familiar involves friction. Thus, the universe in which we live cannot be infinitely old. Just as human satellites cannot be placed in an eternal orbit, neither can the earth have been eternally in orbit. Thus the power used to “start” or “create” the universe is a different kind of power than we have ever observed. Consequently the Scriptures appropriate call this God eternal power.
 - The second thing that we can “clearly see” from creation is the “Godhead”. Something about our universe reflects the nature of God. Dr. Henry Morris spoke on this subject many years ago on campus at the Ozark Christian College. He said that the universe consists of three things: (1) Space (2) Mass (3) Time.
 - Space is the unseen background where everything takes place.
 - Mass is that which takes place in space. There is no such think as “empty space” for everywhere there is space something is happening. There are light waves, heat waves, sound waves, or objects.
 - Time is the phenomenon that enables us to experience the things that happen in space.
 - Dr. Morris then suggested that space, mass, and time help us to clearly see the nature of God. God is like space - He is the invisible background where

everything takes place. Jesus is God made visible and the Holy Spirit is God experienced.

- Dr. Morris then observed that space, mass, and time also have three fold natures.
- The reality of space is length, breadth, and height. Length is an invisible reference. You cannot “see” length until it has “breadth”, and you cannot experience it until it has depth. God is referenced in the first dimension, seen in the second, and experienced in the third.
- The reality of “mass” is also three fold. All created things are merely forms of energy. Things are made of atoms, as you know, and atoms are energy. The energy of the atom is unseen until it is set in motion. The great explosions of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, however, could not be experienced without the dimension of time.
- So also time is three dimensional. The future is unseen, but becomes visible moment by moment, but can only be experienced when time is factored in.

Let us not, however, become so enmeshed in details that we forget the principle ministry of the Holy Spirit - Gal. 5:22 - The fruit of the Spirit is love. Note that this is singular. The Scriptures do not say that the “fruits of the Spirit are”, but rather that the “fruit of the Spirit IS”. Then nine aspects of this fruit are listed for us. Love is first and the rest are so enter-twined with it that they are seen as one.

We have now talked about the Godhead, that is, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and we have shown you from Scripture that love is the very nature of the Godhead. Christians are also known by love - Jesus said that by this all men would know that we are His disciples if we have love one for another (Jn. 13:35). Our love, however, was not first. It cannot take priority over the love of God. This is why John wrote: **“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (I Jn 4:10)**

UNDERSTANDING THE LOVE OF GOD

There is a sense in which the finite mind cannot comprehend the love of God. Note this passage: **“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. (Eph 3:17-19)**

There is an old joke about the lady from Kansas who saw the Pacific Ocean for the first time. “What did you think of it?” someone asked. She replied: “I thought it would be bigger than that”.

Even though we cannot understand everything about the ocean, we can still enjoy its beauty and power. In a similar way, even though we cannot completely understand the love of God, we can still appreciate something of its beauty and power.

John, by inspiration, said it like this: **“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” (I Jn 3:16)** Our text emphasizes the same point - **“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved**

us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (I Jn 4:10)

The poet said:

Could I with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made.
Were every stalk on earth a quill and every man a scribe by trade.

To write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry.
No could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky.

Yes - there is a sense in which the finite mind cannot completely comprehend the vast and profound mysteries of the ocean. And yes there is also a sense in which love of Christ passes knowledge. At the same time, however, people of every age and intellect and experience them both.

NOT SLAVES BUT SONS

As we mentioned before, Paul prayed that we would come to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge. The prodical son may not have known as much as his father, or experienced the totality of His eternal nature, but he got a pretty good idea of love when his father, kissed him, clothed him, honored him, and killed the fatted calf for him.

The March 1999 issue of Biography Magazine tells a remarkable story that helps me to understand the love of God.

It seems that a little boy named Mohammed was born in North Africa in 1972 in the fabled city of Timbuktu. In addition to the problems of poverty and famine he was born with a clubbed foot. His father died when he was very young and his family moved to Kano, Nigeria in an effort to find food.

When Mohammed was about seven he injured his clubbed foot and it became infected with maggots and then gangrenous. Attempting to cure it himself he poured boiling water into the wound, and then salt. Finally, in desperation he poured battery acid on his foot. This stopped the progress of the gangrene and saved his life, but also destroyed a portion of his foot.

When he was about nine years old he was hit by a car and suffered a broken collarbone, shoulder, arm and rib. Soon after, Nigeria was also hit by famine and since Mohammed had a lighter colored skin he was immediately recognized as a foreigner. He was picked up off the street by the army and deported back to Timbuktu without so much as an opportunity to say good by to his family.

He ran away from Timbuktu and tried to make it back to his family in Nigeria. He only made it as far as the city of Gao, in Mali, however, where his physical condition was so bad that he could make it no further. For three or four months he managed to survive on only a piece of bread every day, but he refused to give up. When he was too weak to walk he would crawl. A lot of people were dying around him but he said that he was “lucky” because he had already had most of the diseases they were dying of and had built up an immunity.

Then in December 1984 Diane Sawyer went to Africa to cover the crisis for the CBS television program *60 Minutes*. By the grace of God little Mohammed got 18 seconds of face time on that program. He was 5'4" tall and weighed 65 pounds. He walked with his right ankle bone flat on the ground. His back looked like an S. He had TB of the spine, polio, and three kinds of malaria.

On Aug. 11, 1985 CBS did a re-run of that program and Cheryl Shotts, a mother of three in Indianapolis watched it. She was busy cleaning the kitchen, but somehow she could not get those 18 seconds out of her mind. Finally she announced: “I know what I am going to do. That child is my son. I have to find my child and bring him home”. By her own description she became “a woman possessed”. Within three days she had resigned all her business clients so she could devote herself full time to the search. Diane Sawyer gave her the names of some missionaries in

the area. The Shotts family maxed out their credit cards, used up their savings, and took out a loan for \$12,000 and brought Mohammed home to America.

He arrived at the airport in Indianapolis on Dec. 7, 1985 and was welcomed by a big banner that read "WELCOME TO AMERICA, YOU'LL NEVER BE HUNGRY AGAIN!" Unfortunately, Mohammed could not read English.

The next morning Mohammed got up early and asked for the grass cutting machine and the run cleaning machine. His new mother asked why he wanted these things. He said: "Didn't you bring me here to be your houseboy?"

"No" she responded, "to be my son". Mohammed responded: "I don't know what it means to be a son. You have to teach me, but I promise to learn".

May the Holy Spirit teach and empower us to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge and teach us what it means to be a child of God!

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (I Jn 4:10)

Boyce Mouton