

GOD IS LOVE

by Virgil Meyer

Scripture: I John 4:7-21

Text: *"He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."* (I John 4:8)

In his letter, John points out many truths to the Christians to whom he is writing. We have found that he has taught them many things about God. That God is Light, He is Spirit, He is eternal, He is Father. But perhaps the most clear picture he gives of God is that God is Love. Keep in mind that this is the disciple who called himself, "the one whom Jesus loves," and who wrote the account of Jesus' life on earth in the fourth gospel, the gospel of John. He penned those words that all of us know — "For God so loved the world . . ."

The word "love" is probably one of the hardest working words in the English language. The dictionary I consulted had about ten different definitions for it, and it was followed by sixteen entry words — a variant forms of the word "love."

We use the word in so many ways. For instance I say, "I love chocolate covered peanuts. I love this weather. I love my family. I love my wife. I love God." In each instance the word "love" carries its own meaning. It surely does not mean the same thing, the same degree of intensity when I use it to express my feelings about chocolate peanuts as when I use it to express my feelings for my wife.

As we examined this passage of Scripture we see that love has its origin in God. In verse 7 we read, "Love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God." It is from God who is love that all love takes its source. A.D. Brooke says, "Human love is a reflection of something in the divine nature. We are never nearer to God than when we love. Man is made in the image and likeness of God. Since God is love, for us to be like God, we must also love."

We see, too, that love has a double relationship. In verse 8 we read "Whoever does not love, does not know God, because God is love. Love comes from God and love leads to God."

It is by God that love is known. In verse 12 we read, "No one has ever seen God; but if we love each other, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us."

We cannot see God for He is spirit; what we can see is His effect. We cannot see the wind, but we can see what it can do. We cannot see electricity, but we well know the effect it produces. The effect of God is love. When we know God and accept Him, we are loved. And because

we are loved, we love. This love flows through us and has an effect on others. Then we reach out to others. This love has an effect. It has been said that "a saint is a person in whom Christ lives." We have examples of that in our own time. Such people as Corrie Ten Boom, Mother Theresa and Albert Schweitzer certainly fit this definition of a saint.

And we can often see this kind of love in action around us. Last spring tornadoes wreaked havoc in northeastern Ohio. Homes and businesses were swept away. Three days later three busloads of workers from the Amish and Mennonite communities arrived on the scene to help. They worked tirelessly as long as they were needed. This is an example of how love reaches out to meet a need. This love that we have from God can be shown to others by the effect it produces.

God's love is demonstrated in Jesus Christ. In verse 9 we read, "This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him."

When we look at Jesus we see two things about the love of God. First, it is a love that holds nothing back. God was prepared to give his only Son. Recently, I heard a Sunday School teacher make this statement, "In our human experience there is no grief to compare with the grief that is felt at the loss of a child." God sent His "one and only Son into the world." This was the supreme sacrifice for His love for men.

Secondly, this love of God as demonstrated by Jesus is a totally undeserved love. There is nothing that we can do to earn it. It is given freely. Probably in our human life it can only be compared to the love of parents for their newborn child -- a child who has done nothing to merit it and who in no way as yet can return it. When our daughter and her husband brought their new baby home from the hospital, they sat on the front steps with the baby in his carrier between them. They were overwhelmed by the realization that he was theirs -- that when they carried him through the door, because of their great love for that new little being, life would never be the same. As our daughter put it, "we couldn't give him back." He was theirs to care for and nurture and love.

So it is with God. He loves us so much that He gives us everything we need, even His only Son.

And this human love we feel is a response to divine love. Verse 19 says, "We love because He first loved us. Our love is a reflection or an image of God's love. Dr. George Buttrick has expressed this in the following:

If God had kept the whole heaven between us and him, if always he had been only ultimate Truth, like snow on some inaccessible mountain, how would we know him to be "good"? Or if he had come near as an angel, how could we have worshipped? What do angels know about human tears and

laughter? If the name is **Jesus**, we can account for the love in us, for our love might then be the broken image of his love.

When love comes, fear goes. Verses 17 and 18: "Love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The man who fears is not made perfect in love."

Fear is the characteristic emotion of someone who expects to be punished. So long as we regard God as the Judge, the King, the Lawgiver, there can be nothing in our heart but fear. From such a God we could expect nothing but punishment. But when we know God's true nature, fear is swallowed up in love. We can have confidence in the day of judgment, whether at the Great White Throne or now.

There was a man whose life was one of great influence on others. He had gone through much suffering and betrayal, and had been tested right down to the core. But a few months before his death, he wrote: "When I look back upon the seventy years of my own life, I see quite clearly that I owe my present inner happiness, my peace, my confidence and my joy to one fact: I am certain that I am infinitely loved by God." If we know this truth, the only fear that remains is the fear of grieving his love for us. Perhaps this is what Paul meant when he said, "The love of God constraineth us."

Finally, the love of God and the love of man are connected. In verse 7 of this passage John says, "Let us love one another, for love comes from God." In verse 11, "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." In verse 20, "We love because he first loved us." And in verse 21, "Whoever loves God must also love his brother." As C.H. Dodd puts it: "The energy of love discharges itself along lines which form a triangle, whose points are God, self and neighbor."

If God loves us, we are bound to love each other. John says, with almost crude bluntness, that a man who claims to love God and hates his brother is nothing other than a liar. The only way to prove that we love God is to love the men whom God loves. The only way to prove that God is within our hearts is to constantly show the love of men within our lives.

A king asked his three daughters how much they loved him. Two of them replied that they loved him more than all the gold and silver in the world. The third and youngest said, "I love you better than salt." The king was not especially elated with her remark and dismissed it lightly as an indication of her immaturity. But the cook, overhearing the conversation, left salt out of the king's breakfast the next morning. He then understood the deep meaning of his daughter's remark, "I love you

so much that nothing is good without you.”

The love of God which flows from God to us to others is as salt to food. No relationship is good without it.