

BEDWELL GLOBAL MINISTRIES*

EXPOSITORY SERMON

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LOVE THE MOST EXCELLENT WAY (sermon)

Scripture Reading - 1 John 3:1,11-24.

Introduction

John wrote "this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another." The subject of love is a recurring theme in John's letters so much so that he has been called the Apostle of love. This title however would not have been appropriate before he came to know the Lord Jesus Christ who had transformed his life. He and his brother had been known as the Sons of Thunder and the meaning of that name is self-explanatory. On one occasion he and his brother, out of anger that the Samaritans had rejected Jesus, urged Jesus to call down fire on them. Jesus, however, rebuked them for that was not part of His mission on earth and certainly it was not part of His Spirit. But John had experienced a dynamic transformation through power of Christ's love. Jesus had done something for him and he was no longer the Son of Thunder but the Apostle of Love. And now he writes, "let us love one another, for love comes from God." He mentions love no less than 25 times in his letters. John sees love as the heartbeat of Christian experience. He views it as the essence of what it means to be a genuine Christian as stipulated by the New Testament. He seems to be saying that our profession of the grace of God rings hollow if it is devoid of the love of God. Love is the stuff of Christian experience. He is clear on that truth. There is a definite-ness – a certainty about what he writes. John knows what it means to be an authentic Christian. He does not live in a spiritual fog. He is not lost in a spiritual haze and certainly does not meander in the mists

nebulous speculation. Biblical truth as John sees it not given to speculation. You discover that the truths about which he speaks are projected in stark and vivid terms. He contrasts these truths. He talks about - life and death – love and hate – truth and falsehood – light and darkness. He boldly and without apology and almost audaciously points out that people belong in one of two categories. They are either children of God or they are children of the devil. They are either of the world or are they not of it. They have life or they do not have life. They know God or they do not know God. There are no gray areas in the letters of John. Furthermore, John does not know what it means to sit on the fence. His concern is not to be politically correct or to be seeker sensitive, and so he probably would not fit into segments of our society or even in parts of the church, but I am sure that he would not lose any sleep over it. John's concern was to present truth as clearly and as definitely and as redemptively as he could. He felt this way because these truths were grounded and founded in the character of God, and because the character of God is unchangeable, the truths that flow from Him are unchangeable. God is eternal and His truth is eternal.

There are two great statements made by John that are significant to all of the truths about which he writes in his letters. They are two themes about which he is extremely concerned. The first is,

a. God Is Light. I John 1:5. God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. Light is who God is. Light speaks of His radiant holiness. Darkness is the essence of sin. In God there is no darkness at all. Because God is light we are challenged to walk in the light as He is in the light. The second statement is,

b. God Is love. I John 4:8. "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. And again John writes in I John 4:16. "'God is love, whoever lives in love, lives in God and God in him." There can be no misinterpretation of what John is saying here. It is all very clear. These two proclamations describe who God is in essence. God is light which is descriptive of His transparent holiness. God is transparently holy. In Him there is no stain of sin for in Him there is no darkness. Furthermore God is love. This love is Divine

love not carnal love, fleshly love or even human love. The love that comes from Him is essentially and inseparably tied together with His holiness. Love is the essence of the Divine nature. Now because Holy is who He is, it follows that His love is on a different level to that of the world. It is a holy love devoid of the mark of sin on it. It seems that the truths, guidance and instruction as written in John's letters, are an exposition of these two great truths. They emanate naturally from these two great declarations about God. They are truths to be applied to the life and experience of the Christian, because of this, John exhorts the Christians to love one on another. This love is the highway - it is the more excellent way as Paul describes it. It is in fact the highway of holiness. John in this letter tells us why love is so important in the life of the Child of God. He shows why it is that love is the more excellent way. How does he do this? He does this by emphasizing,

1. THE PRIORITY OF CHRISTIAN LOVE. John 3:11-15. There is no doubt that to John, love is priority. Note what he writes. "This is the message we have heard from the beginning: We should love one another." This being so, love is of first importance. It is of top priority. It is not an option in this business of being a true Christian. This love is a priority because it is,

a. Commanded - 1 John 3:11. "This is the message we have heard from the beginning: We should love one another." This command is not a new expectation or a new requirement. It is not presented as a tenuous possibility. It is not a hesitant suggestion, a convenient option or even a cautious proposal. There is no debate here. There is a sense of urgency – the thrust of intensity – the fire of a passion about this command. "We should love one another." The Lord Himself gave this command to His disciples in John 13:34-35. "A new command I give you, love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." Note the strong note of the imperative in the words of Jesus. "A new command.....you must love one another." When a command is issued to love then love becomes a matter of choice. Love is not a sentimental journey or a fluttered feeling, for if it is then it will fluctuate with our feelings and emotions.

Love is a way we choose to live, an attitude we choose to show and it is an action we choose to take and when that choice is made, it is in the power and abiding presence of the Holy Spirit that we can carry out this command. **Paul reinforces this truth in Romans 5:5 "that God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit."** The command to love given by the Lord Jesus Christ can be carried out by a deliberate choice when that choice is empowered by the presence and authority of the Holy Spirit. Christian love is a command "We should love one another." Christian love is not only a command it is,

b. Crucial. 1 John 3:14-15. It is crucial to our salvation John makes this truth abundantly clear. "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. V.15. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him." This is why I say the Christian love is crucial. It is crucial to our salvation. It is crucial to possessing eternal life. John draws a line in the sand here. What he says may appear to be extreme or even radical, but it is fundamental. John has already said, "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." 1 John 4:8. One has pointed out that in a boiler room, it is impossible to look into the boiler to see how much water it contains. But running up beside it is a tiny glass tube that serves as gauge. As the water stands in the little tube, so it stands in the great boiler. When the tube is half full, the boiler is half full; if empty so is the boiler. How do you know that you love God? You believe you love Him, but you want to know. Look at the gauge. Your love for brother is the measure of your love for God. This was the reaction of the unbelieving Greek writer Lucian (A. D. 120-200) upon observing the warm fellowship of the Christians: "It is incredible to see the fervor with which the people of that religion help each other in their wants. They spare nothing. Their first legislator (Jesus) has put it into their heads that they are brethren." Christian love for others is the measure of our love for God but it is also the evidence that we are His disciples. Jesus Himself said "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples when you have love for one another." Tied in with love for the Lord

Jesus Christ is the love for our brothers, and this the assurance of inheriting eternal life. John said it well. We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death." 1 John 3:14. Hugh Latimer in England, in the days of the reformation, said to his large congregation, "You can build a hundreds churches and fill them with gold statues and with candles as big as oaks, but if you do not love your neighbor and feed the hungry and clothe the naked you will go to hell in spite of all." Those are strong words but John in his letters confirms this to be true. Love for others is crucial to the promise and possession of eternal life. Such is the priority of love to the Christian. But John does not stop here, he moves on to outline,

2. THE PATTERN OF CHRISTIAN LOVE. 1 John 3:16.

One of the essential ingredients of walking the most excellent way as portrayed by the Lord Jesus Christ is that there is

a. Cost in Christian Love. 1 John 3:16. John says "This is how we know what love is Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brother." One of the proofs of Christian love is the example of it. The most perfect example of what love is and should be is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the pattern by which we should live. The Bible clearly says that we are to walked as Jesus walk. John sets down this pattern for us in clear terms so that we do not misinterpret what he is saying. Note his words in verse 16, "This so how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." There maybe a negative reaction to these words. We may "Is it too much to ask that we lay down our lives for our brothers?" But love does not entertain or ask that question. Divine Love simply acts in this way. For that is the nature of God's love. There is no doubt that what comes through in this verse is that an expression of what Divine love is: Jesus Christ laid His life for us." Jesus laid down His precious life on a Cross for us, for no other reason than He loved us. "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son." The cost of love is immeasurable. Love compelled Him to sacrifice Himself for us in the death of the Cross. It was not the compulsion of

unwillingness, but the compulsion of a Divine redeeming love. Stuart Briscoe writes that "human love says, "I will love you IF....God says, I will love you even if...???? That even if men are desperately depraved, that love revealed at the cross was saying so passionately I love even if you have sunk to the lowest depths of sin. That is the ultimate sacrifice that anyone can make. To give up the most precious possession we have is the inexpressible cost of love. Jesus said that "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this that one lay down his life for his friends." The Lord Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. We have a lot of talk about extreme on television. It has become a popular buzz word. It is quite often expressed in repulsive ways. But nothing can compare to the extreme to which Jesus went. The Cross is the extreme to which Jesus went in order to demonstrate His redeeming love for us. The extremity of His love was revealed in power and splendor at the Cross. But the depth, passion and fire of that love is magnified by the fact that His death was no accident. Calvary was love's choice. It was Jesus Christ who laid down His life for us. The death of Jesus was set in the plan and purpose of God for our salvation. The sacrifice on the Cross was a deliberate active choice of God. It was part of His plan for your salvation and mine. Peter on the day of Pentecost told those who had crucified Jesus, "This man (Jesus) was handed over to you by **GOD'S SET PURPOSE AND FOREKNOWLEDGE.**" Acts 2:23. Jesus Himself said ".....I lay down my life... no man takes it from me but I lay it down of my own accord." It was His decision to do it and that is the highest manifestation of love and most certainly was the highest cost that love could pay. It is love that ignores the cost even to death for the sake of others. It is not confined by present parameters. It is not limited by established boundaries. It operates effectively, powerfully and redemptively in the world of extremes. Christ's love delights to act in the realms of the extravagant. Love set out to save you and me regardless of the cost. Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. That is the finest and the most incredible act of love. The cost of Christian love gives birth to,

b, The Concern of Christian Love 1 John 3:16. This has to do with the focus and purpose of Christian love. "This is how we know what love is," writes John, "Jesus Christ laid down His life for us." The important words here are "for us." He laid down His life for us. He was willing to pay the price on a Cross for us. The love of the Lord Jesus Christ in laying down His life for us maybe a noble act – an extravagant gesture – a fine deed, but in and of itself is distant – it is detached – or it its best it is description of a tragic event of a self sacrificing love. It therefore becomes an observation rather than something with meaning for us. But when John clearly states that Jesus laid down His life for us that love and sacrifice takes on a new meaning. We see it in a new light. The truth that Jesus died for us gives profound meaning, significance and hope to His sacrifice of love. "He died for us." There is a sense of awe and wonder in John's striking words in 1 John 3:1. "How great is the love Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God. And John adds "And that is what we are." We are because of the lavishness of God's love for us. This phrase literally means from what country is this love. From where does this love come? We have never seen love like this. The thrust of this thought is that this love is something for which there is no equivalent in the whole of the universe. There is nothing in this whole world to compare with the love of God. From what country does this love come? It cannot be from any country we know, and John never lost the sense of wonder of the love of God because He has lavished it upon us. This is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down His life for us." These few words express both the cost and the concern of the love of Jesus. These words reveal the pattern or example of Christ's love. Having said this John moves on to describe;

3. THE PORTRAYAL OF CHRIST'S LOVE. 1 John 3:16-18, 23-24.Note the words in verses 17 and 18. "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth." John is highlighting the expression or the portrayal of love. He goes on to write, "And

this is command: to believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as He commanded us. Those who obey His commands live in Him, and He in them. And this is how we know that He lives in us: We know it by the Spirit He gave us."

Jesus commands us to portray His love to others even as He did to us. We are instructed to follow His example. Kevin and Ryan, ages five and three, were waiting for breakfast one Saturday morning. As their mother was preparing some pancakes the boys began to argue loudly over who would get the first one from the griddle. Their mother saw an opportunity for a moral lesson and said, "If Jesus were sitting here, He would say, "Let my brother have the first pancake – I can wait." Kevin immediately turned to his younger brother and said "Okay Ryan you be Jesus. He somehow missed the point of what his mother intended him to get. Jesus was presented as the example of love's sacrifice but Kevin was unwilling to follow it. He was quite happy for his brother to follow Christ's example. He was willing for him to make the sacrifice. John made it clear "Let us not love with words or tongue but with action and truth" "David Wilkerson said that "Love is not only something you feel, it is something you do." There are really two dimensions in the expression or portrayal of love. There is,

a. The Upward Dimension. 1 John 3:11-14. The whole tenor of this passage of scripture implies that the first priority of the Christian is to love

God. That is a timeless priority. God established this priority from the beginning of the human race. You shall love the Lord God with your whole being. You shall have no other Gods before me. There is no mystery about this Divine expectation. The evidence of this love relationship with is an unreserved obedience to Him. Jesus made this clear when he said "If you love me obey my commands..." God wants all of our love. Joan Mills enjoyed a bed time ritual with her little boy. They compared how much they loved each other. She said, "I wouldn't trade you for all the boys in the world." Then he creatively compared his love for her by saying, "I wouldn't trade you for forty motor cycles," or I wouldn't trade you for Aunt Judi's pool if it were filled with cash and I was swimming in it."

Joan says one comparison has stood out above all others. One time little Andy said, "I love you with all the pieces of my heart." Does the heart feel like its' in pieces? Maybe it has been broken by disappointments, or torn by decisions, priorities and tasks. Andy is right, our hearts are made up of many different pieces. The question is how many of those pieces will be devoted to God and others? You shall love the Lord your God with ALL the pieces of your heart. Not only is there the upward dimension in this love, but also,

b. The Outward Dimension. 1 John 3:11-14, 18. V. 14 "We know that we have passed from death to life because love our brothers." And verse 18

Dear children let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and truth." In the play "My Fair Lady," Eliza Doolittle expresses the sentiment of many when she cries out, "Don't tell me you love me, show me! Show me! A man was complaining to a missionary about missions in Africa. "How can you go to Africa and preach to them about love when there is so much injustice in our own country?" he demanded. The mission leader's was classic. "We don't go in and preach to them about love. We go in and love them." When they are lost he does not only need advice. When he is hurting he does want theory. When the soul is crushed and broken in spirit by the cruelty of life he does not preachments. When one is confused, lost and sees no meaning in life, he does not need reprimand. He needs love. When a person falls into sin he does not need judgment, condemnation or censure. He needs a healing and redeeming love.

Conclusion

Bruce Theileman.. told of a conversation with an active laymen, who mentioned "You preachers talk a lot about giving, but when you get right down to it, it all comes down to basin theology." Thieleman asked, "Basin theology? What's that? The layman replied, "Remember what Pilate did when he had a chance to acquit Jesus? He called for a basin and washed his hands off the whole thing. But Jesus the night before His death, called for a basin and proceeded to wash the feet of the disciples. It all comes down to basin theology: which one will you

use? When it comes to loving others, you can wash your hands off the affair as Pilate did, or you can humble yourself and love others as Jesus did. This "love is the more excellent way" To love God with of our hearts and to love our neighbor as ourselves is the fulfillment of the law. It is the most excellent way and to walk in this way is to live the life of holiness.

