

Back to Basics

Walking in Love

1 John 2:3-6

Introduction

A group called the Gnostics were what John calls false teachers who claimed to "know God" because they possessed secret knowledge and had dramatic spiritual experiences. Their teaching confused and unsettled the early Christians. "How can we evaluate their claims? How can we truly know God for ourselves?" John rejects the Gnostics' claim to know God and their way of knowing God through secret knowledge or dramatic spiritual experience. Instead, he says knowing God is deepened by walking in the light.

We saw last week that walking in the light means believing in God and accepting God's truth for your life. It is acknowledging that God is morally righteous and agreeing that you need God's moral leadership in your life. It is being honest with God and yourself about your sin and humbly receiving God's forgiveness through Jesus' atoning death. But John doesn't stop here. He claims that knowing God is also deepened by walking in Love.

John develops this in Chapter 2. He writes, "Now by this, we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the Love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked." (1 John 2:3-6 NKJV)

Knowing God means keeping God's commandments and walking in the same manner (living the same kind of lifestyle) that Jesus walked.

In verse 7, John writes, "Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining." (1 John 2:7-8 NKJV)

This ultimately involves keeping one particular commandment. It is often called the Great Commandment. It's found in Matthew 22:37 when a lawyer challenges Jesus as to which is the greatest commandment. Jesus said to him, '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 the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40 NKJV)

In John 13:34, Jesus says, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35 NKJV)

In 15:10, Jesus says, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My Love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His Love. "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:10-12 NKJV)

Knowing God centers around humble honesty about our own sins and our need for Jesus' forgiveness. That's why we need to dig deeper into what this Love looks like and why it is so central to knowing God.

I. A Commandment of Love

God revealed the command to love one another in the Old Testament. But in the New Testament, Jesus provides it with fuller and deeper meaning in several ways:

Jesus placed a new emphasis on love by teaching that love is the most crucial commandment because it fulfills all the rest of God's commandments. A young lawyer asked Jesus "Teacher, which *is* the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, '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 the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:36-40 NKJV)

In other words, the reason why God prohibits sinful attitudes and behaviors is that they are unloving. Rom.13:8-10 says, "Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," "YOU SHALL NOT MURDER," "YOU SHALL NOT STEAL," "YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS," "YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if *there is* any other commandment, are *all* summed up in this saying, namely, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love *is* the fulfillment of the law." (Romans 13:8-10 NKJV)

The heart of the law is not simply negative; with commands of "Don't steal, or Don't lie," it is positive and active "Love and help others," and "Honor your parents." If you keep all the negative commands but can't keep the positive ones, you aren't really fulfilling God's law. Jesus says in John 15, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." (John 15:13)

He demonstrates this Love by laying down his life to pay for our sins. Then He calls on us to lay down our lives in practical ways to meet others' needs. In 1 John 3:16, John says, "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. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the Love of God abide in him?" (1 John 3:16-17 NKJV)

The love of God is not sentimental niceness. Agape love gives sacrificially to meet a person's needs, whether it's material resources, direction, correction, or encouragement.

II. A Call To Love

Jesus also calls us to love all kinds of people.

Love motivates us to accept and help others of different races, ethnic backgrounds, cultural tastes, and social ranks. We don't only love those who are just like us! Jesus alludes to this in the story of the Good Samaritan. Agape love extends to those who mistreat us and even call us enemies.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:44, "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more *than others?* not even the tax collectors do so?" (Matthew 5:44-47 NKJV)

Jesus takes love to a whole new level. And while we sense he is right, we know we're not equipped for it. But there is good news. Jesus, not only models this Love, He calls us to practice it and provides us with opportunities to do just that. John tells us that Jesus not only showed the world this true Love; he can also live *in you* and enable you to show it to others.

He wants to live in your heart through his Spirit. And his Spirit teaches you how to both personally experience God's Love and how to share God's Love with others. The Holy Spirit imparts a supernatural motivation for us to love others the way he loves us. The Holy Spirit helps us learn to love others sacrificially even when we are in need ourselves. The Holy Spirit can also teach you to love others who are different from you and even those who don't love you. He can personally guide you and help you express God's love to specific people in specific situations. The question is, Is Jesus' Spirit in you?

It isn't difficult to receive his Spirit. You don't have to participate in some elaborate ritual. You don't have to learn some secret knowledge or handshake. You don't have to reform your lifestyle. All you have to do is to have the desire to be more like Christ, or as Jesus said, admit your spiritual thirst and come and drink.

In John 7:37, it says, "On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified." (John 7:37-39)

If you truly love Jesus, then his Spirit will indwell you. Only the Holy Spirit can quench our thirst for God's love and fill our hearts with love for others. Are you truly ready to come to Jesus and drink?

III. A Bond of Love

Loving others the way Jesus loved you is evidence that you know God because only God's Spirit empowers us to love this way. It is also the way we come to know God better.

John tells us that loving others leads to greater closeness with God. He draws a connection between loving others and experiencing God's guidance in your life in verse 9. "He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes." (1 John 2:9-11)

The Gnostics claimed they received enlightenment from God even though they practiced hating others and told others that their behavior was ok. But John rejects this. He says if you want direction from God, you must be committed to loving others.

God enjoys teaching us how to love others. The Holy Spirit is a master at prompting and directing us how to show God's love to others. When we walk in His love, we experience God's direction. Those who live selfishly or hate others are really cutting themselves off from God's guidance. That is how you wind up "in the dark," wandering away from God's guidance and using others to get what you want.

The way back to God's guidance is to confess this sin and turn back to God. It's incredible how quickly the lights come back on when you do this! Maybe you're one of those who needs to do this to get back on track with God.

John says there's a definite correlation between loving others and experiencing assurance and peace in your life. He writes, "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things." (1 John 3:18-20)

He is *not* saying that we earn God's acceptance by loving others. The issue is experiencing God's acceptance and peace. It's an assurance that comes quickly when we reach out to love others. When your heart is aligned with God's, you always feel closer to God. When doubts arise, or others tell us we don't know God, God's Love will assure us our heart is like His heart as we allow Him to love others through us. Nothing will rob you of assurance and peace in your relationship with God more than living selfishly.

Conclusion

John draws a connection between loving others and having a confident prayer life. In verse 21 of Chapter 3, he writes, "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment." (1 John 3:21-23)

When we follow God's guidance to love others, we pray for the resources we need to love the people God is putting into our life.

God answers our prayers because they conform to his will. As we experience answered prayer, our confidence in praying to God grows. If you're trying to get God to help the universe revolve around you instead of aligning your heart to follow God to love people, God won't reinforce your selfishness by answering your prayer—he loves you too much to do that! If you persist in this self-centered focus, you begin to think it does no good to pray, and so you pray less and less—and then quit altogether. But it's amazing how quickly your prayer life comes alive when you start praying for other people and asking God to give what is needed to help them.

What kind of confidence do you have in your prayer life? Have you listened lately to the way you've been praying? It is all about you? Or is it about the benefit and help that others need? God promises to take care of our needs when we commit to walk in His light and live in His love.