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A0445 -- Nov. 07, 2004 – 1 John 4:7-10 – God is Love

John the apostle has finished his short digression on the Holy Spirit and other spirits that have gone out into the world to deceive Christians into worldly doctrine. Christians can be deceived and if they are this will greatly hinder their ability to love one another. The result is division. It is becoming increasingly difficult to keep people out of false doctrine. We know from Scripture that in the last days, apostasy within Christianity will increase. The way this is starting to manifest itself in America is that orthodox, Bible-believing, Bible-teaching churches are becoming much smaller and much more dispersed than they used to be. According to ex-students and professors of Dallas Theological Seminary, when we compare the number of good Bible students in the 1960s and 70s with those in the last ten years, we find that for every one good Bible student today there were 40-50 in the 60s and 70s. That is a major shift. The result in American culture has been the shift from a genuinely intellectual form of Christianity to a New Age Mysticism that is not Christian at all.

This can do nothing but produce a lack of genuine Christian love among believers (2 Tim. 2:24; 1 Tim. 4; 2 Tim. 4). As John just showed us in 4:1-6, we have to deal with false teachings before we can move on toward focusing on loving one another. Now John returns to his main theme, the theme of Love. You can see that Christian love is not wholly disconnected from avoiding false doctrine by means of the One who is in you, for He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. John taught us how to test the spirits by seeing whether they speak the truth, that Jesus Christ came in the flesh or not. Now Paul turns from the test of a false spirit to the mark of the true Spirit: expression of Christian love. If Christians avoid false doctrine, they can focus on loving one another. If not, they will never reach Christian love.

(The One Who is Born of God and Knows God Loves)

Greek Text 4:7 Agapetoi, agapomen allelous, hoti he agape ek tou theou estin, kai pas ho agapon ek tou theou gegennetai kai ginoskei ton theon.

Translation 4:7 'Beloved', let us love one another, for love is of God, and everyone who loves is born of God (perfect tense) and knows God (present tense).

Beloved is an endearing address in the vocative voice, meaning “listen closely.” John repeats Jesus’ command **let us love one another, for love is of God**. When we obey this command to **love one another** we are doing something that finds its source in the heavenly Father (**for love is of God**). God is the source of all love and therefore, whenever we express true Christian love, that expression find’s its source in God Himself.

It follows, then, that two things can be said of **everyone who loves**: (1) they are **born of God** and (2) they **know God**. Notice that John means two different things by these two phrases. Being **born of God** is something different than **knowing God**. Many people think that when John says a person **knows God**, he simply means the person is a Christian. That is not what John means. John has much more in mind than simply a title for a genuine Christian. This can be easily shown by looking at the next verse. We would expect that John would state the exact opposite of v. 7, but notice he doesn’t. Here, he merely says, **he who does not love does not know God, for God is love**. Notice that John left off the **born of God** part! **Born of God** refers to regeneration. It is a title used to distinguish a Christian from a non-Christian. But knowing God means much more. Therefore, John leaves off the part about being **born of God** in v. 8 because a genuine Christian may not love his Christian brother! Just because one is a genuine Christian does not guarantee that he will love his Christian brothers, even though many commentators refuse to admit this. Many commentators say that a genuine Christian *will* love his Christian brother. In fact, many use the epistle of 1 John to prove this. But there is not a single ounce of support for this statement anywhere in the Bible, much less in 1 John! These commentators are reading into the text (eisegesis) a presupposed theology, a toxic bias, which distorts John’s profound writings. They would rather support their system of theology than hear what the apostle has to say (1 John 4:6)!

We have already learned several things from this epistle that are similar to what John is teaching here. First, turn back to 2:11: “*But the one who hates his brother...*”. Notice *his brother*. One must first be a brother before he can hate *his brother*. The grammar is as clear as it can be that this is one Christian hating another Christian. To think or claim that a genuine Christian cannot hate another Christian is not only contrary to common experience, but it is also contrary to the grammar of God’s word.

Second, turn to 3:10b: “*Anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.*” Once again, what are we to do with the words *his*

brother? We cannot just dismiss it and say, “Oh, this must be a guy who professes to be a Christian but really isn’t, because all Christians love other Christians and all Christians do righteousness.” You can’t say that just because your theology doesn’t match up with John the Apostle’s theology. If John wanted to say that he very well could have. All he would have had to do was say *a brother* rather than *his brother*. That would have made it abundantly clear that John was talking about someone who professed to be a Christian but really wasn’t. But since John said *his brother* then we have to conclude that genuine Christians may not do the righteousness of God and may not love their Christian brothers.

Finally, skip down to 3:15: “*Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.*” Once again, commentators say, “Oh no, this must be a guy who professes to be a Christian but really isn’t, because no Christian can be a murderer; and besides, this verse says that murderers do not have eternal life.” Problem: Once again, these people are reading into the text what their theology tells them is possible or not possible for a Christian. Many people cringe when I tell them that a genuine Christian can be a murderer and that a genuine Christian may not have eternal life abiding in him. I have had people challenge me on these verses I’m bringing up today. People keep saying, “These can’t be genuine Christians. Christians don’t hate other Christians and Christians don’t murder others. How then can you be saying these are genuine Christians hating and murdering others?” I can assure you, the Bible never teaches that Christians can’t hate other Christians and can’t murder others. However, don’t get the idea that I advocate such actions. John and I clearly stigmatize sin as something that has no place in the Christian life. But still, the Bible does not teach that a genuine Christian can’t hate or even murder others. If a Christian did murder or hate another, he could not lose his salvation (Rom. 8:35-39).

In this verse there are two keys to unlocking John’s meaning. *First*, as in the two previous passages we looked at, John says *his brother*. One must first be a brother before he can hate *his brother*. The spirit of hatred is the spirit of murder because one who hates his brother would not really care if *his brother* were dead. *Secondly*, John doesn’t say that *no murderer has eternal life*. He says *no murderer has eternal life abiding in him*. Having *eternal life* and having *eternal life abiding in you* are two totally different things! To not have *eternal life* is to not be saved. But to not have *eternal life abiding in you* is to not have Christ, who is eternal life (1 John 5:20), *abiding* with you when you murder or hate another Christian. So, John is doing very much the same thing here in 1 John 4:7 (and he will do this again down in 4:20, 21; and 5:16). John is not contrasting a genuine Christian with a non-Christian. When John says one **knows God**, he is not just saying they are a Christian, he is saying much more than that. He is saying that this Christian has advanced knowledge

of the Father (1 John 2:3; 13, 14). Christians who have advanced knowledge **love one another**. Remember that Jesus was with His apostles three years before he even gave them this commandment (John 13:34)! They had advanced knowledge of the Father by that time but Jesus did not think they were ready for this commandment until they had spent three full years under His teaching and ministry. If the apostles had to sit under Jesus' teaching and ministry for three full years before receiving this commandment, then how many of us are ready to receive this commandment and obey it?

(Born of God One's Don't Love if They haven't Come to Know God)

Greek Text 4:8 ho me agapon ouk egno ton theon, hoti ho theos agape estin.

Translation 4:8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

Verse 8 shows that if a genuine Christian **does not love**, then he has not really come to **know God** as his heavenly Father (2:3), because the **God** who has begotten him **is love**. This is the second time John has touched on the attributes of God in this epistle. The first time was in 1 John 1:5. There he said, **God is light**. We said there that this referred to God's perfect holiness and His revelatory nature. God is totally without sin. He is not a little bit sinful. There is no sin in Him, not even a bit. He is absolutely holy (Book of Leviticus). And, because God is light, He reveals Himself. We looked at the doctrine of revelation last week. We said God reveals Himself in creation, conscience, and audibly in the Scriptures through prophets and apostles. Now John is bringing up the attributes of God again, this time it is the attribute of **love**. **God is love**. This does not mean that God has no other attributes, like all-powerful. God's attributes are not pieces of God. In other words, God is not the result of adding love to omnipotence to omniscience to holiness to truth, etc. In other words, God cannot be broken down into parts so that you could say that God is partially love and partially sovereign and partially holy, etc. God is all of these things infinitely. God's attributes are all enmeshed together.

Often, unbelievers criticize Christians for having a problem with Evil (Theodicy) saying, "How can your God be both all-loving and all-powerful at the same time? If God is all-loving then He must want to remove evil. Since He doesn't, He must not be able to remove sin. If He is able to remove sin and yet He doesn't, then He must not be all-loving. Therefore, God cannot be both all-loving and all-powerful at the same time. This is a contradiction." What is the Christian solution to this supposed dilemma? Well, there is no problem with saying God is all-loving and all-powerful. There seems to be a problem when we add the third element; evil.

Basically, the Christian answer is to press God's all-loving nature to its logical conclusion. We cannot deny that **God is love**. So, what we have to say is that because **God is love** then God has a morally good reason for allowing evil to continue. What we challenge the unbeliever with is how his worldview can distinguish evil from good in the first place. In a world with no absolute moral standards established ahead of time by a divine Creator, all we are left with is relative morals. Morals are reduced to social conventions. If morals are simply social conventions, then we have to overlook 9/11. We can't say there was anything wrong with what those men did on 9/11 because that was the moral convention of their society. They were doing what was moral in their eyes. If you say it was wrong because it did not produce the most happiness among people, we simply ask, "How do you know that in the future it will not ultimately produce the most happiness in the world? Maybe the people who died in the two towers would have caused more unhappiness than the terrorists!" So, hopefully you can see the dilemma the world has with evil. Christians do not have a problem with evil. We simply say, "Because God is love, God has a morally good reason for allowing evil to continue." We also can say that evil will be dealt with and that the reason God has not yet dealt with it is because He is patient and gracious, desiring that all should be saved (1 Tim. 2:3-6). If God judged evil tomorrow, then the opportunity for salvation would end at that moment, grace would be over. But God is patiently waiting for men to believe the gospel. This demonstrates that He **is love**.

The Scriptures declare that God loves the whole world (John 3:16). This is not just the world of the elect, but all men. If man fails to believe, He is condemned for not believing (John 3:17) because of who he is in Adam (Rom. 5:12), and on the basis of his deeds (Rev. 20:13) and his words (Matt. 12:37). He is condemned on many counts, and even though God does not wish that this person will go to hell, this is what that person has earned (1 Tim. 2:3-6). God *wishes* that all men would be saved (He is optimistic); but God's *wishes* are not the same as God's *will*. If God's wishes equaled His will then all men would be saved on the basis of 1 Tim. 2:3-6. So, the question for you today if you have not believed that Jesus Christ is the Son of God is, will you believe? Do you have ears to hear? Or does the message of the cross of Christ offend you? The cross of Christ is offensive because it tells you that you are insufficient, that you are not good enough, that your works are no better than filthy rags. I realize very much that the cross of Christ is offensive. I also realize that the Father can overcome this obstacle. The Word of God says that no one can come to the Father unless the Father draws him (John 6:37, 44). Is the Father drawing you? If He is, won't you believe? The gift is eternal life, life of the highest quality and in the presence of God.

(God's Love Demonstrated by Sending His Only Son into World)

Greek Text 4:9 en touto ephanerothe he agape tou theou en emin, hoti ton huion autou ton monogene apesalken o theos eis ton kosmon hina zesomen di autou.

Translation 4:9 In this the love of God was revealed to us, that God has sent His one of a kind Son into the world in order that we might live through Him.

In this is cataphoric (refers to what follows). Here John is giving evidence that **God is love**. What could demonstrate more clearly that **God is love** than **sending His only begotten (one of a kind) Son into the world** for our salvation? As humans we should be able to identify with this kind of love. Why? Because human relationships mirror the relationship in the Trinity. The Father-Son relationship was not first experienced in human families. It was an eternal relationship between God the Father and God the Son. Since **God sent His Son into the world**, it proves that Jesus Christ was a **Son** before He was **sent into the world**. This verse shows the doctrine of eternal generation: that Jesus Christ did not *become* a Son when born of Mary but that He always was a Son.

The Father-Son relationship is an eternal one that is reflected in temporal earthly father-son relationships. If you are a father or a son here today, then you have plenty of information in the Bible illustrating what a father-son relationship should look like, and it is the perfect example. What type of love exists and is expressed between a father and a son? Parental love, a very high form of love. People have asked, “Do you believe in love at first sight?” I do. But love at first sight is not between husband and wife but between parent and child. It is lust at first site for husband and wife. But it can almost be stated with dogmatic certainty that all married parents fall in love with their children “at first sight.” This is a finite form of the love between God the Father and God the Son. The words **only begotten Son** need to be clarified. They do not mean that the Son had a beginning in time or even in eternity past. Jesus Christ was not the first creation. The Greek word (*monogenes*) means **one of a kind** and some translations simply say **only Son** (e.g., New Jerusalem Bible and NIV) which is a valid translation. The angels are called the “sons of God” and even men are said to be the “offspring of God.” But angels and men are sons by creation, they are not one of a kind sons of God. But Jesus Christ is not a creation, He is therefore the **one of a kind Son of God** because He is the eternal God Himself. Now think what kind of love it would take to surrender your own son. Now think how much more love it is to surrender your one and only son. It is hard to imagine this kind of love. This is the kind of love that God the Father demonstrated to us, the surrendering (temporary loss of an eternal fellowship) of His one and only Son into a sin-filled **world**.

Why did God do this? **In order that we might live through Him**. It is not clear here, but verse 10 indicates that God’s only Son had to *die* that we might *live*. This is the Death/Life

Principal. When God revealed His love for us, two opposite extremes were taking place: *death* for God's Son and *life* for us. That the Father would allow this for His Son and that the Son would obediently follow His Father's will demonstrates the immeasurable nature of this love. Most American people are not confronted with this truth in a visual way anymore; for your life to be sustained requires death of another. In our culture we just go to the local HEB and buy a pound of ground meat. It is really too bad that things are this way. It makes reality abstract. We didn't see the cow killed, the blood, the dead carcass, we just go on our merry way and forget that even happened. People don't realize that every time you eat any kind of meat that something had to die to keep you alive. This is a principle from Genesis 9:3. It was only *after* the flood that God gave every moving thing that is alive for food. For the first time, men could eat meat. And one of the reasons God gave men the right to eat meat was so that every time they ate meat, they would be reminded that something has to die for you to live. The same is true in the spiritual realm. Someone has to *die* for you to *live*. That someone is the Lord Jesus Christ. I hope I didn't ruin your lunch, but every time you eat a piece of meat you should remember the death/life principle. The only difference is that animals do not voluntarily give their life for you, but Christ did voluntarily give His life for you.

(2 Characteristics of Divine Love: Initiatory and Spiritual)

Greek Text 4:10 en touto estin he agaph, ouck hoti emeis egapekamen ton theon all hoti autos egapesen emas kai apesteilen ton huion autou hilasmon peri ton amartion emon.

Translation 4:10 In this is love, not that we loved (perfect tense) God but that He loved (aorist) us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

The death of Christ is clearly in view here. God didn't just **send His Son** but He **sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins** (and not ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world; 1 John 2:2). This verse (4:10) is what love is really all about. Since **God is love** it is necessary that we draw our concept of love from His perfect display of it.

What are the characteristics of true Christian love? *First*, God's love is not a response to our love. John says **not that we loved God but that He loved us**. Loving someone because they already loved you does not measure up to this standard. Jesus Himself said, "*For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?*" (Matt. 5:46). True Christian love for Christian brothers does not require that our brother love us! *Second*, God's love was expressed to meet our spiritual need: **and He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins**. Ultimately, this means you should love the unlovely or the unlovable. Some people are not easy to love at all! But this is no excuse for not loving them. Some Christians sin a lot or commit sins you consider monstrous acts

against God and men. This is no excuse for not loving them. Was Christ not sent to pay for all sin? Was Christ sent only to pay for the not-so-bad sins? Or was Christ sent to pay for all sin no matter how monstrous?

How can we express true Christian love? We already learned in 3:17 that if we close up our bowels (built-in physical signaling system) to a Christian who has physical needs then the love of God is not abiding in us. So, we already know that we can express true Christian love by responding to our bowels positively when we see a Christian in physical need and we help sustain his physical life. Here we are taught that we can also express true Christian love by providing for a fellow Christian spiritually. There is a myriad of examples that could be given. One will suffice to get across John's point. Suppose you know a brother who is stuck in sin. What is the proper Christian response? How can you express Christian love toward him? The only way is by prayer and by confronting him. If he does not repent, then you move to discipline and restoration of your brother who is stuck in sin. By doing so, you are providing for his spiritual needs! Not to pray for and confront your brother and maybe even discipline and restore your Christian brother who is stuck in sin is to fail to follow the Savior's example. John would state it this way: to not restore your brother is to hate your brother. This needs some serious contemplation! Church discipline that involves restoration demonstrates Christian **love**. Failure to pray for and confront fellow Christians demonstrates Christian hatred! If we don't, we have no excuse. Christ died for all men and all sin no matter how monstrous the person or the sin. Since no person and no sin is beyond the sacrifice of Christ, then no brother or sister should be beyond our sacrificial love. If we act as if they are beyond or not worthy of our love, we have no excuse. We have just displayed Christian hatred.

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