

God Is Love – Part 6

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Believers are commanded to love one another out of the very nature of God
2. aim – To cause us to seek to love others in imitation of the love of God manifested in Christ
3. passage – 1 John 4:7-21

b. outline

1. The Nature of God as Love (1 John 4:7-8)
2. The Manifestation of God as Love (1 John 4:9-16)
3. The Response to God as Love (1 John 4:17-21)

c. opening

1. the **picture of judgment**
 - a. the story (parable?) of **The Sheep and the Goats** (read Matthew 25:31-46)
 1. **note:** this story may be understood to be a *parable* – the change of the *primary character* from “the Son of Man” in v. 31 to “the King” in v. 34 seems to indicate a change of sense
 - a. **i.e.** a story designed to *make a point* = not necessarily *how* the Judgment will proceed, but *who* the Judgment will *separate* – **IOW:** *what it means to either be a sheep or a goat*
 - b. **IMO:** although good men differ on *how/when* the judgment(s) may occur, the *simplest picture* is of an event that can be observed *with many different facets* – primarily re: salvation, but also dealing with the reality of *what people have done in life*, including *punishment* for evil and *reward* for righteousness
 2. **question:** on what *basis* does Jesus separate each person to either his right or to his left?
 - a. liberalism, Catholicism: the “blessed” are those who are kind to others – their *behavior* (e.g. generosity, compassion, care) determines their fate – the **social gospel**
 1. however, the parable strongly suggests otherwise ...
 - b. **#1:** Jesus refers to each person brought before him *with an inherent nature* – the *original separation* (vv. 32f) is based on the *nature* of each person, *being* either a sheep or a goat
 1. **fascinating:** everyone today wants to be the G.O.A.T.
 - c. **#2:** Jesus uses *predestinarian language* to address the sheep (v. 34) – they are “blessed by my Father,” and inherit a kingdom prepared “for you from the foundation of the world”
 1. **note:** Jesus *does not use* predestinarian language for the goats (see v. 41)
 2. this suggests that Jesus sees sheep *very differently* – their fate is determined *before* they *do anything positive in the world* – they are *sheep*, thus they are saved (**period!**)
 - d. **#3:** Jesus tells this story after **The Talents**: the Master *knows the nature of his servants*, and their *nature* determines *both* their actions *and* their judgment (**i.e. well done, ...**)
 - e. so, Jesus is teaching that the *primary reason* each person is judged unto life or death is **what they are by nature**, and what they have *done* is simply **the evidence thereof**
 1. **the point:** you who are mine will be *recognized* when I return ...
 3. **question (rare):** **how can a goat become a sheep?** does “good behavior” *transform* goats?
 - a. **i.e.** what “divine mathematics” does God use to determine *exactly when* a person magically “transforms” by what they have *done* – what kind of “scoring” is used for each action?
2. the **current point** (back to 1 John 4:19ff ...)

- a. God has manifested his *intrinsic* love to us (**i.e.** as the God who “is love”) in two (2) distinct ways, each **complementary to** and **utterly dependent upon** the other (**the coin**):
 1. **the primary manifestation:** the sending of the unique One to propitiate God’s wrath (v. 10)
 2. **the parallel (personal) manifestation:** the sending of the Spirit to bring forth life (vv. 12-13)
 - a. from us, a **profession:** a *confession* of our love for who Jesus *truly is* (vv. 14-16)
 - b. from us, a **perfection:** a *great confidence* born in us; a love that “casts out” the fear of a Judgment that is to come (vv. 17-18; see above)
 - c. (**now**) from us, a **practice:** a *deep compassion* that swells out of us towards our fellow brothers and sisters *because of the love of God in us*
 1. **i.e.** the Spirit not only leads us to know Christ, and to no longer fear judgment, but also (in this **context!**) to give us a great *desire* and *compulsion* to love fellow believers
 2. **remember:** this love for others is the *chief commandment* of this pericope (see v. 7)
 3. **IOW:** all of vv. 7-19 rises to *why we must love our fellow brothers and sister in Christ*

III. The Response to God as Love (1 John 4:17-21)

Content

b. our love of others from his love (vv. 19-21)

1. the **origin** of our love for others (v. 19)
 - a. **exegetical detail:** John *does not* say “we love others” or “we love God” or “we love ourselves”
 1. no, he does *not* include a qualifier; he is simply referring to *love as a general human concept*
 2. **remember:** love exists in us as a part of the *Imago Dei* = human beings have the capacity to love *as a uniquely divine gift* given to us out of the very nature of God himself (“*God is love*”)
 - a. animals *can* express “forms” of connection with other animals, but they *cannot* form the deeply divine idea of *personal, contrarian, self-sacrificial, commitment* towards others
 - b. unfortunately, in the Fall, love was deeply *corrupted* – it became primarily *self-focused* and *impersonal* (i.e. what’s in it for me), and now “expresses” itself in forms of evil
 3. by not including the qualifier, John is referring to *all manner of love* flowing from us: love for *God* (at the beginning), love for ourselves (as creatures made in his image), love for others
 - b. John argues that true love flowing out of us is the result of having **first been loved by God**
 1. **note:** this statement *should* settle any synergism in the **Ordo Salutis** – this is a *very specific* statement, by an apostolic writer, of the *origin* of our ability to love (anything!)
 2. **answer:** **the goat becomes a sheep by the transforming love of God**
 - c. **principle:** **our ability to love (at all!) is because God has loved us first**
 1. the Spirit gives us the ability (**in regeneration**) to love God – to find ourselves born-again, in a peaceful and harmonious and *loving* relationship with our Creator *through Christ*
 2. this becomes an ability to love ourselves – to know that we are no longer *under judgment*, and to see ourselves as *God now sees us in justification*
 3. this flows into an ability to love others – to turn from *selfishness* to a deep concern for the care of others, **to live out the original intention of love in the Imago Dei**
2. the **sincerity** of our love for others (v. 20)
 - a. **identity theft:** to act the part of someone else (that you are not) in order to use that identity to personally benefit; to “steal” the identity of another for personal gain, especially financial
 1. a common reality *in society*: even *beyond* the financial (e.g. transgender identity = to act the *gender* you are not in order to reap the “benefits” of being of the opposite sex)
 2. a common reality *in the church*: goats “acting” as sheep, “stealing” the identity of being a “Christian” in order to benefit from it (i.e. *convincing others* that you belong to Christ)
 - a. Jesus recognized this, even warning against *wolves in sheep’s clothing* (**Matthew 7:15**)
 - b. John makes it clear (**in v. 20**) that simply “claiming” to love God does not “cut it” *unless* that claim is followed up by *genuine* love of others
 1. John’s “example” is the person who “says” he loves God, but “*hates*” his brother
 - a. **note:** John does not say what “*hates*” means here, but it (probably) hearkens back to his definition of brotherly love in **3:16-18 (read)** = self-sacrificial care for others *in truth*
 2. John argues that such a person *cannot* truly love God, since his actions demonstrate a *heart* that is “unaware” of God (i.e. an intrinsic nature that does not “see” him)
 - a. **i.e.** since God is “unseen” (literally), we can only “see” him through our view of others = how we see others (right before us) is a *clear indication* of how we see God (who is visible *through* them by virtue of being created in his *Image* and *having the Spirit within them*)
 - b. or, the nature within us (of either of rebellion against God or regeneration by the Spirit) will *truly come out of us* as we respond to the *needs of others* (**Matthew 12:33-37**)
“Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”
- c. in the **parable:** Jesus clearly teaches that he *knows the difference between sheep and goats*
 1. many **falsely** assume that it is *kindness towards others* (in specific acts) that separates them
 2. however, all such acts carry a “**sniff test**” of the nature of the person doing them
 - a. **picture:** acts of love, carried out by sheep, carry the “smell” of being done by a sheep – acts done by goats *in sheep’s clothing* still “smell” like goat, even though they may be acts that “appear” to be loving and generous in the nostrils of others
 3. **remember:** the Spirit “casts out” fear (**vv. 17f**) in all those who have been transformed by his power – the true sheep of Christ stands before him on that Day *in great confidence*
- d. **principle:** **our love of others flows out of the love of God that abides within us, a love that has transformed us – it’s not what we do, but who we are**

3. the **command (repeated)** of our need to love others (v. 21)
 - a. John “bookends” his description of the nature of God as love (in v. 7) by repeating the *obvious*:
 1. those who love God must also, *by extension*, love their brother
 - b. **(from chap. 3) the true child of God must be characterized by a love for others, especially (and primarily) for those who are also in the family of God (fellow believers)**
 1. the Father has loved his own, made them his children, and embodied them in his Son (3:1-2)
 - a. this makes the elect *far greater* than they can fully grasp *now* (3:3)
 - b. and, it creates a *pursuit* within the elect: to *purify* themselves of sin (3:4-10)
 2. love (in general) is “central” to what God intended in his original creation of humanity (3:11)
 - a. love is *resisted* (3:12-13), but it is *evidence* of having “*passed from death to life*” (3:14-15)
 - b. love is *based* on the example of Jesus who “*laid down his life for us*” (3:16a), which compels us to “*lay down our lives for the brothers*” (3:16b-17)
 3. the believer’s love for others cannot be *theoretical*; it must be *active* and *real* (3:18)
 - a. it must always be applied “*in truth*,” never in lies (3:18c); *truth* is evidence of true love
 1. the “marks” of truth assure us of God’s love (3:19-24): a love for *Jesus*, the *Word*, the *church*, other *believers*, and (even) our *enemies*
 - b. yet, Christians *are not to be gullible* (4:1-6) – we are to “*test*” every “*spirit*”, for there are many “*false prophets*” who perpetuate *perverted* ideas of love
 4. **(this series)** thus, the believer’s love must be based on the very nature of God himself (4:7-8)
 - a. it has been manifested to us by the sending of the Son (4:9-12)
 - b. and in us by the sending of the Spirit (4:13)
 - c. this results in love pouring out of us in a *confession* of Christ (4:14-16), and a *casting off* of the fear of judgment (4:17-18) – a radical change in our nature (4:17b):
“as he is so also are we in this world”
 - d. God has loved us first, which means that we are compelled to love others; as the true sheep of Christ (formed in the love of God), our *absolute desire* is to love *other sheep* (4:19-21)
- b. **true love is at the “core” of what it means to be a part of the family of God** – it is central to God’s *purposes* for this creation, and the church is to “redeem” love by living out *what the world was originally intended to be*: true relationship with others “under” our relationship to him
 1. God has “overturned” the corruption of Adam in Christ – his nature of *self-sacrificial commitment* has become *our* nature, too!
 2. **the church is to be a place where the converted act like him** – they see their fellow brothers and sisters with same *compassion* and *care* that Jesus did, and they love
 - a. and they will hear him say on the Day of Judgment: ***well done, good and faithful servant!***