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What's Love Got To Do With It

1 John 4:7-21

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“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is Love.”

There are many ways of expressing love within our human natures. Love can be a complicated emotion having its roots in our Heavenly Father and its deceptions based in worldly distortions.

To express our deepest sense of love we often use the symbolic picture of loving someone with our hearts. We will say to our loved ones, “I luva you with-a all-a my heart” implying a completeness in our love....Have you ever seen a real human heart? Not so pretty. Are we really saying, “I love you with my blood pumping muscle”? Not so romantic when put that way. In other cultures it is the liver that becomes the seat of emotion whereby true love is expressed. I envision two lovers sitting across from each other with love in their eyes. As he reaches for her hand he expresses his love, “sweetheart, you make my liver quiver.”

Funny as these metaphors of love sound, they are serious in their intent. The seat of emotion comes from deep within. We are made in the image of God after all and God is love. But his love is so pure, so complete, so beyond our comprehension that there needs to be a way for us to reach beyond the tangible and experience true love. Metaphors are a way by which this is possible: We can see this in the way God relates himself to us in various forms of interactions: we are the clay and he is the potter (Isaiah 64:8), he is the vine and we are the branches” (John 15:5). We are the sheep and he is the shepherd, (John 10:1-18). Symbolism allows us to get as close to God as possible. Under the symbolic nature of bread and wine representing the body and blood of Jesus, the Real Presence of Christ mysteriously abides the elements in a most miraculous meeting of heaven and earth. Christ in us and we in Christ...The indwelling of Christ at the Holy Table is a tangible way by which we experience Christ

with us in a very real sense...here the symbolism becomes a reality. The symbolism of loving from the heart or the liver also become the reality of what resides within our deepest places where the Holy Spirit acts within us. The symbolic explanations of God are seated in reality.

Without these deeply rooted insights of God's overwhelming love, what are we left with? FISH LOVE! If I tell you I love fish, what images are conjured in your mind? Do you envision me talking sweetly to the fish or holding the fish in my arms as I caress it? Probably not. What you might envision is Fr. bill out on the lake in hopes of running a sharp hook into the mouth of some hungry fish that he might take such fish home and lay it on his grill. I do love fish...but with a different kind of love. Fish love is a self-seeking kind of love. A love that asks only, "what can you do for me and my happiness, what do you have to offer?" In our current day and age it is Fish Love that is replacing the transcendent love of God. The sacrament of marriage is being secularized and changing life partners is as common as changing occupations. As the reality of God's love becomes myth, the serpent once again gains ground.

But God is not dissuaded because of mankind's callousness. God did not send his son into the world to die for us because we loved him first...true love does not have this requirement. This is made clear in John's first epistle:

"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." In our sin, we are outside the will of God and have no love for God. It is by God's love alone, in the essence of the Holy Trinity, that a narrow path has been laid, leading to the eternal presence of God Almighty.

But in a world focused on fish love, how are we to respond to such overwhelming love? We respond in faith. Our faith in Jesus Christ is evidenced by our own outpouring of love; for God's creation, for our brothers and sisters in the faith and love for those yet to see the light. *"Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit...whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God*

*dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.” You see, if we love God it is because he loved us first and it is His love that instills the compassion that drives us to care for the lost. We are not to be afraid, but to be confident; “Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. Fear hides in the shadows, love yells from the highest peaks. Fear gives in to blasphemous ideologies, love proclaims the truth! Love...”*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.**

We can't have it both ways. We cannot follow the sinful inclinations of mankind out of one side of our mouths while at the same time proclaiming our love for the one and only God of truth. Fish love is not Heart love. Worldly love is not Godly love. We CAN express true love in this world but only from the deepest recesses of our hearts where God leads us in truth, where Christ dwells within and the Holy Spirit guides perpetually. *“If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: Scripture tells us, for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”* Don't be fooled...easy love can be a deception away from God's eternal love. If we are to love only those who love us back, those whose company we enjoy, then we have not grasped the full capacity of the eternal love of God, by which he has entrusted us.

Only by walking in the true love of God are we able to extend such love to those outside the faith. Real love can only be given—never taken. And real love can only be received by a heart willing to forgive. We must pray for our enemies, we must pray for those who shun God, we must pray for those who are misled and deceived by demonic deception. Only the true love of God has the power to influence the worldly natures of man into the divine light of Jesus Christ.

It has been said that “love is a rose” and it has also been said “every rose has a thorn.” If God's rose to mankind is Jesus Christ then surely the thorn is man's sin formed into the crown that rested upon his head at Calvary. But high upon His cross the love of God did not condemn us but

the words of Christ do compel us, *“Father...forgive them...for they know not what they do.”* This is true love!

And every Lord's day we are reminded of these words from scripture, *“thou shalt 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. The second is like unto it; thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”*

The full armour of God Almighty is love...may that love be active in your hearts.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.