**EVERYONE WHO LOVES KNOWS GOD**

October 28, 2012

1 John 4:1-21

Key Verse 4:7 “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.”

The disciple whom Jesus loved wrote this letter of 1 John. He was present when Jesus washed his disciples’ feet and told his disciples to wash each others’ feet. He heard Jesus speak a new command: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” He was there when Jesus poured out his blood on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for his sins and for the sins of the world. John could not really love his brother Peter until after Jesus died and rose again from the dead, and after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church. It is because disciples could not really love one another unless they tasted the grace and knew the love of Jesus. We have no strength to love one another unless Jesus comes to dwell in our hearts and reign as our Lord. In this chapter, John writes about love, the love that comes from God. It is clear that John is not talking about human love; he is talking about something more than emotional feelings. He is talking about God’s love. God of Islam wants our submission by force. But our God loved us first while we were still sinners. Islam teaches that God is unknowable. But when we accept God’s love and love our brothers, we can know God and overcome the spirit of the antichrists.

I. Test the spirits (1-6)

There are many false spirits in the world. We should watch out and overcome them. Look at verse 2. “This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.” One of the antichrists is Islam. The term “Islam” means “submission” to the will of God. The person who submits is called a “Muslim,” or a submitted one. Today, Islam is the second largest and fastest-growing religion in the world. It claims to have 1.2 billion followers. For Muslims, the Qur’an (Koran) is considered the inspired word of God. The word Qur’an means “recitations” which is based on the angel Gabriel supposedly instructing Muhammad to recite the revelations he received. In length, the Qur’an is slightly shorter than the New Testament (four-fifths its length) and contains 114 chapters called Surahs. One of the most mentioned individuals in the Qur’an is Jesus. He is mentioned 35 times. If you were to talk to a Muslim about Jesus, they would eagerly say that they believe in him. In fact, they say that in order to be a true Muslim one must believe in Jesus.

What exactly do Muslims believe about Jesus? The Bible says Jesus is God, but Muslims believe he was only an apostle. The Qur’an uses the phrase “son of Marium” (Mary) the majority of the time when referring to Jesus. Muslims believe that words like father or son imply that God would have to have a wife. They reason that Jesus could not be the son of God since God doesn’t have a wife. What they fail to understand is that Jesus is God’s Son not in the sense that the Father procreated him, but rather in the sense that Jesus himself is just like the Father in all his characteristics and attributes. The ancient Semitics used the phrase “Son of...” to indicate likeness or sameness of nature and equality of being. This is why when Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, the Jews understood he was claiming to be God. The Bible says Jesus is the Savior of the world, but Muslims believe he was only a prophet. Islam doesn’t have a savior, it’s a religion of works. It’s a religion based on rituals rather than a relationship with God. Islam is so works-oriented that it even teaches that your good works can actually cancel out your bad ones.

When we see the antichrists gaining power, we are afraid. But John assures us that we will overcome them. Look at verse 6. “You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.” Islam advocates global domination and the subjugation of all non-Muslims. Their history has been one of conversion by the sword! Allah wants our submission. But God is love. He loved us first by sending his one and only Son Jesus Christ to die for our sins. Let’s think about the fact that God is love.

II.God is love (7-21)

There’s an old song that says, “Love is many-splendored thing.” The very concept of love is one of the most permeating themes in the world today. The Beatles sang about in the sixties. Their message to a hurt and frightened world was, “love is all you need.” According to Amazon.com, there are at least 350,000 books currently that deal with the subject of love. If you were to do a google-search on the internet, you get 8.2 billion hits. But with all this information available, love has become a very confusing subject. When I watch TV, check the internet, it’s clear that our society has a very poor understanding of love. I heard about a single mother with two school age children. This mother wanted to enjoy her life freely. So she gave her children a lot of cough medicine and drugged to sleep. Then she and her boyfriend went out and do whatever they wanted. When a social service worker came to take away her children, she protested, “I love my children!” But is that really love? With humanity so confused about love, who is to say what love is?

The Bible helps us with our understanding of God’s love. In the original Greek language, there were four words for love. Eros- refers to erotic love; Storge- refers to family love; Phileo- refers to brotherly love; Agape- refers to God’s love. In I John 4:7-21 the word agape occurs 27 times. God wants us to see the wonderful nature of His love. God cares about us! He loves us! God’s love is manifested in all eternity; past and present and future. In the past, God manifested his love by sending his one and only Son Jesus Christ as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. In the present, God’s love is manifested in us by dwelling in us and making us complete. In the future, God’s love will be manifested in us in giving us confidence on the day of judgment.

**First**, God’s love is personal. Look at verses 7-8. “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” I think the overriding impression of these two verses is that the love of God is personal. God’s love causes us to know him, and him to know us. A.W. Tozer said, “The love of God is one of the great realities of the universe, a pillar upon which the hope of the world rests. But it is a personal, intimate thing too. God does not love populations, He loves people. He loves not masses, but men.”

One of the most powerful messages that we can take to people today is that God loves them. Every individual person is important to God, and he loves each one. All people matter. You matter. I matter. When teaching his disciples, Jesus said, “Aren’t five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid! You are worth more than many sparrows.” (Luke 12:6-7). Isn’t that amazing!? There is not a single bird that falls from the sky without God’s notice; and how much more important are we than a few birds? So much more important that God even knows every hair on your head. While some of us may have a few more hairs than others, the message is the same: God loves you and he knows everything about you. God’s love for us is personal. Jesus illustrated this again when he said, “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep, and my sheep know me--just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. So I lay down life for the sheep” (John 10:14-15). One of the outstanding characteristics of good shepherds was that they knew each one of their sheep by sight and often by name. And so Jesus says, “I know my sheep.” God’s love is universal, but it is also individual. As St. Augustine put it, “He loves each one of us, as if there were only one of us.”

**Second**, God’s love is a proven love. Look at verses 9-10. “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” God’s love for us was “manifested”, or proven to us, through the life and death of Jesus. Love is a verb; it requires actions, it’s demonstrated through behavior—and the love of God is no exception. Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrated his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Have you ever heard the parable of the pit?

A traveler fell into a deep pit and couldn’t get out. Several people came along and saw him struggling in the pit. The sensitive person said, “I feel for you down there.” The judgmental person said, “Only bad people fall into pits.” The curious person said, “Tell me how you fell into the pit.” The legalist said, “I believe you deserve your pit.” The Zen Buddhist said, “Just relax and don’t think about the pit.” The optimist said, “Cheer up! Things could be worse.” The pessimist said, “Be prepared! Things will get worse.” Jesus, seeing the man, took him by the hand and lifted him out of the miserable pit. The point is—it doesn’t do any good to talk about love and compassion without demonstrating it. God demonstrates his love. He’s proven his love for us.

**Third**, God’s love is made complete in us. Look at verse 12. “No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.” God’s love completes us; it makes us whole, and gives significance to our lives. Without the love of God, we would never be complete. There would always be something missing. God’s love—as with all true love—is meant to foster the personal growth and development of the one he loves. That also tells us that God’s love is not selfish; He is genuinely looking out for our best interests.

One of the most powerful and hope-filled promises of the Bible comes from Romans 8:28, which says, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” God wants good things for us. Everything that God does in your life and mine is for our own good. That’s what agape love is all about—wanting and doing what is best for another person. And remember, God’s goal for your life is to make you like Jesus, to give you a heart like his, and transform you into the best possible version of yourself. And that’s what God’s love does when we let it into our lives—it changes us from the inside and makes us better than we ever could have imagined.

**Fourth**, God’s love drives out fear. Look at verse 17. “In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him.” God did not send his Son to die on the cross just to prove that he loves us, but to save us. Because of God’s love (and only because of God’s love), our lives can be saved for all eternity. We will not fear and have confidence on the day of judgment. The prophet Hosea said that we are linked to God with cords of love, cords that cannot be broken (Hosea 11:4). The gentle cords of his eternal love bind all our hearts and hurts to him.

When we accept his love, we can love our brothers. Look at verse 19. “We love because he first loved us.” God did not wait for me to love him first. He first sent his servants to me to study the Bible with me and love me unconditionally. I was very proud and only had worldly ambitions. Nevertheless God loved me first, he accepted me first and welcomed me just as I am. He did the same for all of you also. God’s first love, his first initiative to love us when we were at our most unlovable should be a great encouragement to help us to love our brothers.

If something’s been missing in your life, or you sometimes feel unloved, Jesus invites you to experience the soul-changing love of God. It is only by the love of God that this life takes on real meaning, and we can find purpose in living. May God bless you to accept God’s love in Jesus Christ and love your brother and sister in Jesus Christ.