

12/04/26

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1 John 4: 7 - 12
Seeing the Invisible God

“Speak the truth in love”. It is important to have a firm grip on the truth. Without that spiritual seconding of the truth (love) and the evidence of that truth indwelling the person and being lived out in their demeanor, actions and speech, it is just the shell of the truth. John returns to his subject of doctrinal and subjective, real and experiential truth about love, over

and over again. Truth and love must work together in tandem for us to say, “This is Christianity”. A loveless orthodoxy is not Christianity, neither is a very affectionate heresy. Looking around the world, its art and poetry, love is no small theme. Love is important to everyone. “Love, love, love all you need is love” sung by the Beatles repeats the word 62 times in 24 verses. Impressive!! Unsurprisingly we find the word ‘love’ in the Bible: 505 times (ESV), 280 times (KJV), depending on the word the translators use to distinguish between the 6 different words for love found in the Bible. As far as the Bible is concerned the epicentre of the use of the word love is in 1 John 4:7-12. In the original Greek John starts with, “Dearly beloved”.

If you go to a club like parkrun the community is so supportive and positive, encouraging and welcoming, happy, easy-going and friendly. Quite honestly it is often warmer and sweeter than a church congregation by a country-mile. So, are we saying that they are more of God than the church? Does every group of loving people know God? In the context of 1 John there is a tension in the local church between those who have left and those who remain. It is those who remain who know God. The parkrun is a far less intense community of people than those meeting in the church. We are all here from every walk of life as wretched sinners of every conceivable sin and needing washing. By a miracle of grace we work and serve together. This is not an easy association. As they came to put their faith in Jesus Christ the historic hostility between the Gentiles and the Jewish people meant they had to learn to walk together in love, calling each other brother and sister, living as a family, even though their culture dictated otherwise. There isn't that kind of pressure in a parkrun. The church is under great pressure and strain in a world where there is so much opposition to everything we try to do and express. If you keep loving each other, that is from God. It is because you know God. That is how we persevere and keep going; forgiving one another and overcoming the offenses and the difficulties of it all. God is at work in your life. People were turning away from the Christian community to a lesser gospel, sometimes with great hostility and finger-pointing and recriminations, bitterness and anger. They are hurting badly but if you carry on loving one another that is of God. Be encouraged, you are the children of God your Father who is love.

The love of God is a very particular kind of love. In scripture there are two uses of the word love. “I love lasagne” (desire), or some brotherly association between two men who support the same football team. There are two key words: ἠσέδω (hesed/ loyal steadfast love, OT) and ἀγάπη (agape/ unconditional, selfless, and sacrificial NT). The love of God is a disposition of graciousness, kindness and patience extended to those who may or may not be worthy of that forgiving love. “Love covers a multitude of sins” (1Pt 4:8) It recognises all the shortcomings, failings and flaws in all its ugliness and is still gracious and kind. God is that kind of love. This is the kind of love we are being called to time and again. There may not be a sense of personal affection or agreement on all manner of things but we are all of God so we persevere with each other courteously. Good manners is a very practical way of being considerate and thoughtful to people with understanding and kindness. Take an interest in others and work on problems together through discussion.

But nobody has ever seen God. We have this God who is love and yet we haven't seen him. "No man can see God and live" (Ex 33:20) Even Moses was only allowed to see God from the back as his glory passed in front of him and God proclaimed "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth": hesed, hesed, hesed. Moses could not see him but he could hear him. God is Spirit. Jesus said you can't see the wind but you can feel it. You can't see love but you can feel it. You can see what it does as it opens people up and makes people grow and their souls flourish with joy and peace in unlikely circumstances. Unconditional, unchanging love changes your life because you are in safe hands and you know that whatever you do you cannot fall out of the grace of this kind of love. Like the Prodigal Son, no matter how far you go or what you do, when you come back, he is there. God's love never changes. God was, God is and God always will be love.

You can experience the love of God. "This is how God shows his love" (v9) Love just cannot remain undeclared or hidden. It must show itself. When you love you cannot stay quiet. You have to make sure that the object of your love receives your love because that is the nature of love. Love needs to be known and benefit, enrich and help its object. When God sets his affection on you he will show his love for you whatever it costs. We realise in verse 10 what it cost him. Would you have given your one and only son? He did and his Son came gladly because the Son is the same as the Father. God is love. Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. You can see God's love in every detail of the creation, all the kindnesses and providences, all the things that happen in our lives. Supremely he shows his hand in Jesus Christ and him crucified. Is there a greater love? Do you need any further persuading? What do you need or want to be finally happy content and at peace; to put all that restlessness at bay once and for all so you stop fretting and belly-aching? What is your complaint or is Jesus Christ enough? Are you happy with Jesus? Do you know you are loved because that is the will of God? He demonstrates his love by making an atonement for our sin: missed our way, wandered from the path, fallen short of the goal. None of us can say that we are a beacon of love in this world. We have all fallen short. Jesus has filled that gap and we are accepted by God. That is a wonderful thing. Believe that God really loves you. Not everyone has had God set his affection on them. It is a gift, a privilege and honour. It is a joy and source of eternal thankfulness. It is not something you can keep to yourself because if you have been loved and you are full and satisfied then it just overflows into other people's lives to the point where they can't get when they are so rude and dismissive of you that you keep coming back with a smile on your face telling them about Jesus.

There is something unstoppable about this love. Even though people are leaving this little fellowship that John has been caring for they are to carry on loving one another regardless of the bitterness and recrimination. It is becoming clear that the leavers have not been walking with God. But the church is to carry on walking with God and loving one another. What else is there to do? There is no room in the church or a Christian's life for anything that is loveless. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength" (Deut. 6:5; Mat 22:37, Mk 12:30, & Lk 10:27). Love your neighbour as yourself and the foreigner that comes amongst you. (Matt 22:39 & Lev 18:34) There are no excuses; "Love your enemies says Jesus" (Matt 5:44) That's how we have been called to live. The more we live like that the more like God we are and the more evident it becomes that we are indeed his children. Love has to be shown. If it is not evident we have to ask, 'Is it really there?'

"...if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us" (v12) That word complete (telos τέλος in Greek) means the end of something as in *telescope* to see the end of the universe. It is the purpose for which a thing is started. God's end purpose and will is that we might be changed and start to show his kind of agape/hesed love to one another. That is the goal. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" and everything else will fall into place. Let the love of God be the guide and the path will open up before you. Keep on loving because love is of God. You are of God. If you love them show it and let us love one another.