

## Love God & Hate Your Neighbor?

### 1 John 4:16-21

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Love! What does the word mean? Many see love as a feeling in the heart that they have for someone, usually of the opposite sex. That love is often described as some sort of spark they feel when that person is around. That is the predominant definition of love today. That however, is not the love spoken about in our text.

And, if pastor Jerabek were really with it, he'd say love is also acceptable between two women, or two men. No! That is not it at all – God's definition of love in our text is not a sexual thing. You and I are instructed by God to love all people unconditionally, including those who hate us. This kind love we are to have for everybody is not the kind of love like the love I have for my wife when we're home alone and the lights are down. The sort of love described here is a selfless love, agape love, it is an act of the will toward another. It is the kind of love God has for us.

In our text, we are told that this love is not optional. In fact, our text says, *If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar.* You heard it correctly. If you say that you love God, but you hate your brother, you are a liar.

Hearing this, our first inclination is to ask, "Who is my brother?" Everybody is your brother. It means you are not to hate anybody. Very quickly then, the response comes back, "Well, I don't hate anybody!" Really? According to whose definition, yours or God's?

It is amazing how we will try and twist things so that we don't have to feel guilty about our sins. Remember the story of the Good Samaritan? Who was it that "loved" the beaten man dying on the side of the road? I am sure that those who passed by on the other side would not have said they hated him, but they certainly did not love him.

What is surprising is that both of those who made the effort to pass by on the other side of the road were church leaders – a priest and a Levite. How could such upstanding leaders in the church just walk by and leave someone bleeding and dying on the side of the road? Because they did not love him! Period! End of discussion! There was no action of the will on their part to care for their neighbor.

In the chapter before our Epistle lesson for this Sunday, we read: *By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.* (1 John 3:10-11)

The children of God love one another. Dear friends, this is not an option in your Christian life. If you do not love your neighbor, then you are not a Christian!

Is it loving to speak ill of your neighbor? Is it loving to cheat your neighbor? Is it loving to lust after your neighbor's spouse? Do you remember the expert in the law questioning Jesus about what he needed to do to earn eternal life? Jesus asked him what the Law said, and his response was twofold; (Luke 10:27) "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." To this Jesus responded, do this and live. But the expert in the law, trying to justify himself asked, "And who is my neighbor?" That is when Jesus gives the parable of the Good Samaritan.

We're like that expert in the law, we also want to justify ourselves before God, "Who do I really need to love, God?" What we mean when we ask that is, "Is it OK if I don't love so-and-so? They have done such-and-such to me and they don't deserve my love."

Dear friends, not only are we to love everybody, we are to forgive all and be reconciled with all. After giving the Lord's prayer, Jesus says, (Matthew 6:14-15) If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Forgiving others is not an option, it is a requirement with a promise – a rather harsh promise to be sure, but a promise nonetheless – if you do not forgive, neither will God forgive you.

Now, you do understand don't you, that where the forgiveness of God does not cover your sin, there is no place in heaven? Where God's forgiveness does not cover sin there is only hell and eternal damnation. When we refuse to forgive, God does not cover our sin with forgiveness.

That is a hard teaching. That is a strict demand. Every single one of our sins is a sin against God. There may be someone who has sinned against us many times, but compared to our sins against God, their sins against us are miniscule. How can we not forgive those few sins against us, when God has forgiven *all the sins* we have committed against Him?

Jesus tells a rather scathing parable about that as well. You remember the servant whose master forgave his great debt, a debt he could never repay? And how that same man was unwilling to forgive the minimal debt of his brother servant? The master heard about it and had the first one thrown in prison until he should pay all he owed. In other words, he would never be released.

This passage on forgiveness after the Lord's Prayer is a part of what many people call the sermon on the mount. It is seriously to the point. It must be serious, for Jesus said something similar even earlier in that sermon about how we are to treat our neighbor. He said: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." (Matt. 5:21-24)

Did you hear it? If there is something that is unreconciled between you and another, you are to be reconciled with your brother **before** you come to the altar. This applies today as well, especially since what we receive at the altar is the gift of God's forgiveness. We must be reconciled with our brother before we come to the altar. In fact, to receive the sacrament without forgiveness in our hearts toward our neighbor would be to sin against the forgiveness offered in the eating and drinking of the body and the blood of the Lord. We should not commune if we are not reconciled with our brother, for that is to despise the very forgiveness Jesus offers in the sacrament.

Dearly beloved of God, John spells it out for us in our text. *If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.*

Ouch, this one hurts, doesn't it? There are those who we do not love as God would have us love. There are those whom we would rather not forgive, especially if we do not have to.

God looked down at sinful mankind. He looked at all those who willfully disobey Him, all those who do not love as He requires them to. He looked down and what did He say? Did He say, "You know what, why bother, let them all burn! They have heard my commands, they know what I expect. If they do not do as I require, why should I have mercy upon them?"

Of course that's not what God said. Instead, He loved us. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to take on human flesh and live the life of love we cannot live. Jesus loved, but cruel men beat Him, whipped

Him, spat upon Him, mocked Him, and nailed Him to the cross to die. And what did Jesus do? He loved them! He said, "Father, forgive them!"

You have heard it said, greater love has no man than this, than He lay down His life for His friends. Jesus lay down His life for those He loved, His friends, those who despised Him, hated Him, and murdered Him.

This is the love of Jesus Christ, God's Son, for you. He laid down His life for your sins. He loved us while we were yet unloving – while we were yet, sinners. His love, given as the ultimate sacrifice, covers our sinful lack of love. He loved us on the cross into the forgiveness of sins.

Today Jesus invites you to come to His love. He commands that His love be showered upon you, that you hear the words of love He'd speak to you – your sins are forgiven.

Jesus invites you to come to His love. He commands that His love be showered upon you, that you eat and drink of the love He sets before you. Eat of His very flesh which He lovingly allowed to be pierced for you. Drink of the blood He lovingly spilled for you, for it is in this meal that your sins are forgiven. It is a meal that pours the love of Christ into you, strengthening you in the true faith, so that you may love as He has loved you.

Dear friends, we could consider our lack of love and be filled with fear, but the perfect love of God drives out fear – the perfect love of God is the forgiveness of our lack of love. Consider God's love, hear other words that John penned in the Gospel that bears his name – words we heard in the Gospel lesson last week. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:16-17)

Know that you are forgiven by God C and loved by God C unto life everlasting. Amen.