

CHAPTER XII

THE SOURCE OF LOVE

I John 4:7-12

A. *The Text*

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God. (8) He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. (9) Herein was the love of God manifested in us, that God hath sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. (10) Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (11) Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (12) No man hath beheld God at any time: if we love one another, God abideth in us, and his love is perfected in us."

B. *Try to Discover*

1. How can John say "everyone loving has been begotten of God," and then refer to Jesus as "the Son, the only begotten One?"
2. How is the practice of loving evidence of knowing God?
3. How can John say "God is light" (I John 1:5) and then say "God is love" in this passage?
4. How is God's love for us related to our loving one another?
5. What is the end perfection of God's love?

C. *Paraphrase*

"Beloved! let us be loving one another; Because love is of God, And whosoever loveth Of God hath been born And is getting to understand God: He that doth not love Doth not understand God, Because God is love. (9) Herein hath the love of God in us been made manifest, That His only begotten son God sent into the world, In order that we might live through him. (10) Herein is love: Not that we have loved God, But that He loved us And sent forth His son as a propitiation concerning our sins. (11) Beloved! if in this way God loved us We also

ought to love one another. (12) Upon God hath no one at any time gazed: If we love one another God in us abideth, And his love hath been perfected within us."

D. *Comment*

1. Preliminary Remarks

In Part II, John presents the three tests of eternal life in the abstract. He deals with them in terms of attitude toward personal guilt, toward our brothers in Christ, and toward Jesus.

In Part III, John shows us the practical application of these tests, as righteousness, love and belief become the active demonstration of the attitude.

As attitudes, these tests are considered evidences of "walking in the light." Practically applied, they are considered proofs of Divine Sonship.

In this last section of I John, which we shall cover in Part IV, these same tests are shown to be inter-related. Eternal life, manifested as righteousness, love and belief, is one grand whole.

2. Translation and comments

a. Love is imperative because God is love . . . v.7-8

(7) "Beloved, continue loving one another, because love is from God, and everyone loving has been begotten from God and is knowing God.

(8) The one who goes on not loving never did get to know God, because God is love."

God came to know experimentally, through the incarnation, what it is like to be a human being. (Hebrews 2:14-18) We get to know Him experimentally through the experience of loving. Loving is the only experience totally common to both God and man. The person who does not love does not know God because no other experience which is possible to man is identical to anything else God does.

Man has tried to share in the experience of God by doing his own will. This is a privilege which God has reserved for Himself, and when man does it, it is sin and lawlessness. God does not allow us to do our own will, but demands that we do His will.

Man has tried to share God's intellectual experience, and in so doing has succeeded only in making a fool of himself. (Cf. Romans 1:22) Man at his best is pitifully ignorant as compared to God. "The foolishness of God is indeed wiser than the wisdom of man!"

Knowing God is eternal life. (John 17:3) God's desire for man is that we shall get to know Him by loving as He loves. In giving ourselves for the purpose of providing life to others we may come to know "what's it's like to be God" without harming ourselves in the process.

Love takes its source in God, and only those whose lives originate in Him through the divine begetting can love as He loves. Consequently, when we do love in this way, we give evidence that our life finds its source in Him.

Our loving proves that we are His children and that we know Him. It is not our love which produces kinship to God; it is kinship to God which produces love in us.

Perhaps some special attention should be given to the statement that God *is* love. John does not say love is God. In 1:5, he informs us that God is also light, but he does not say that light is God.

The ancients often did worship light as god, and we call it idolatry. The modern American practice of falling in love with love is the same idolatry in new garb.

b. God sent His Son to demonstrate love . . . v.9-10

(9) "In this was openly demonstrated the love of God in us, because His Son the Only Begotten One, God sent into the world in order that we might live through Him. (10) In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as a covering on account of our sins."

John is aware of the virgin birth. Jesus is not merely *a* son, but the *Only Begotten One*. What we may become through adoption, He is by right of eternal identity. What we may be by right of re-birth, He is by right of birth.

We are begotten of God by grace through obedient trust. He is the only one actually begotten in the customary sense of the word. He alone is *Son of God* by right. All others who are God's children are so by grace through adoption. (Cf. Gal. 4:4-6)

In the fourth Gospel, John refers to Jesus, the Incarnate Word, in a phrase unique and definitive. John 1:18 calls Him as "God, only-begotten."

Our English versions read "the only begotten Son," in John 1:18. However, the footnote of the American Standard Version (1901) refers to "certain very ancient authorities" as reading *God only begotten*.

Wescott points out that these are "two readings of equal antiquity" and that there is "no ancient Greek authority for the reading, *the only begotten Son*" in John 1:8.

It is not within the scope of this present writing to present manuscript evidence sufficient to support one manuscript reading over against the other. However, many trusted scholars have done so and have concluded that *God only-begotten* is the correct reading of John 1:18.

Such a claim to deity for Jesus by John is not surprising. Both the fourth Gospel and the first epistle of John are written to reaffirm, in the face of philosophic denial, that He is indeed God as man.

John 1:1 makes the claim, "the word was *God*." In the original language of the New Testament, the meaning was clear. The claim is not that Jesus and the Father are the same person, but that they are of the same nature. That which is the real nature of God is also the real nature of the Word. The true constitution of both is Deity.

That two persons have the same nature as Deity ought not give us any more trouble in acceptance than that two people can have the same nature as humans. This does not violate the fundamental faith of Israel expressed in ". . . Jehovah, He is God, there is none other than He alone." (Cf. Deut. 4:35) There is but one Deity, as opposed to humanity, just as there is one humanity as opposed to animal. The Father and the Son share this divine essence.

The term "*Son of God*," as used multitudinous times in the New Testament in reference to Jesus does not deny that He is God. On the contrary, it rather describes the limits placed on His revelation of Deity. It is true that ". . . in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." It could not be otherwise if He is indeed *God only-begotten*. But we ought never assume that, as a man, Jesus revealed the entire infinite essence of Deity.

That such is not the case is evident from such statements as that made by Paul that "He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant . . ." (Phil. 2:7) As J. B. Phillips so patly puts it, deity was "focused" in the man Jesus. This is perhaps the most powerfully significant fact with which the human mind can be confronted. The Creator of the universe, the Source of life itself actually stooped to take the form of one of His creatures.

This is precisely the truth denied by the gnostics, and is the focal point of everything John wrote in the fourth Gospel and I John.

The supreme function of this Incarnate Deity was to give life. The most quoted (and perhaps least understood) verse in the Bible is John 3:16. It is restated in I John 4:9. The extreme to which love will go to bring life to its object is only seen in the crucifixion of Incarnate Deity, God only-begotten, the Son of the Father.

To deny the Deity of Jesus is to set aside the only adequate demonstration of love, and consequently to "short circuit" the only source of life.

This is, as well, the meaning of the virgin birth. There is no other way in which Deity can become human and still be God. The unique birth of Jesus, seen in this light, is not a miracle but a scientific necessity. To bring life to man, God must love to the fullest. The martyr death of one who is only human is not equal to the requirements of such love. Deity must die if humanity is to live.

Here is the heart of the Christian Gospel. The philosophies of men, past and present, advocate a reverence for God as they understand Him, which amounts to love as they understand love. Real love is not demonstrated in this way but in the death of the Incarnate Word as a covering for human guilt. We cannot but cry out, as indeed John did, "look what sort of love the Father has given in our behalf . . . !" (I John 3:1)

c. The obligation to love . . . v.11

(11) "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also are morally obligated to keep on loving one another."

Failure to love our Christian brothers is as immoral as adultery or murder or the infraction of any other commandment of God. It is for this reason that "enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, parties, and envyings" which show the absence of love are listed in the same inspired sentence as "fornications, uncleanness, lasciviousness . . . drunkenness, revelings and such like." (Gal. 3:19-ff)

No person can claim to have eternal life who does not love others having the same life by virtue of the same divine blood. No matter how correct the doctrine, no matter how pious the demeanor, no matter how stained-glass the personality, one who does not love has no life in Christ.

It is Jesus' own sacrifice which carries the moral obligation to so love our brothers. We cannot claim to "have that mind" in us "which was also in Christ Jesus," (Phil. 2:5) until we have emptied ourselves of ourselves and given ourselves for the sake of bringing and sustaining life in the children of God.

The readiness of many church members to cut and slash and assassinate the character of a fallen brother is a far cry from the love which demands that he bear a cross in his brother's behalf, not in spite of his brother's weakness, but because of it. True spiritual life is demonstrated when love acts to "restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness . . ." (Gal. 6:1)

d. The perfection of divine love . . . v.12

(12) "No one has ever seen God at any time; if we go on loving one another, God is remaining in us and His love is having been perfected in us."

The love of God reaches its intended end when God lives in us. His presence is demonstrated by our love for one another. Where this love is absent, God is absent, and therefore, experientially unknown.

The boldest claim of the gnostic was that he knew God. While making this claim he denied that Jesus was really God as man. In making the denial, he removed the only demonstration, in the comprehensible human experience of love, of what God is like. He thus put the lie to his own claim.

The proof of this is that no one has ever seen God *as God*. In the Old Testament, God was seen in various manifestations called *theophanies*. In Jesus, men saw God *as man*.

No one can, therefore, claim to know God from having seen Him fully as He is, in all the splendor of His glory. We can only know God experimentally as He lives in us and thus brings us to experience what He is like by empowering us to love as He loves. This cannot happen outside of Christ. "No one cometh unto the Father" but by Him. (John 14:6)

This is the purpose for which the Word became flesh. The love of God reaches its end perfection, the accomplishment of His self-revelation to us, when He lives in us and teaches us to love one another as He loves us.

Paul's prayer for the church was ". . . that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, that you may be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inward man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; to the end that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled to the fulness of God." (Eph. 3:16-19) Paul too was aware that love is the demon-

stration of God's perfected purpose in man. It was he who wrote, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging symbol." (I Cor. 13:1)

Small wonder that Jesus said that on this "hangeth all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:40)

E. Questions for Review

1. Why does John say we are to love one another?
2. What is the source of Christian love?
3. God got to know what it is like to be human through _____.
4. The experience by which we get to know "what it is like to be God" is the experience of _____.
5. _____ is the only experience common to both God and man.
6. Loving your brothers proves that we are _____.
7. Does John say that love is God? Explain.
8. What evidence is there in I John 4:9-10 that John is familiar with the virgin birth of Jesus?
9. Jesus is God's Son by _____ while we may become God's sons through _____.
10. How do you reconcile the claim that Jesus is God as man with the statement, "Jehovah, He is God, there is none other than He alone?"
11. The term Son of God applied to Jesus describes _____.
12. The supreme function of the Incarnate Deity was to _____.
13. What is the only way in which God can become a man and still be God?
14. Our acceptance of God's love for us carries with it the moral obligation to _____.
15. One who does not love has no _____.
16. The love of God reaches its intended end when God _____.
17. Evidence of God in us is that we _____.
18. The ultimate knowledge that man can have of God comes from the experience of _____. When this happens, the love of God has reached its intended end in a person's life.