

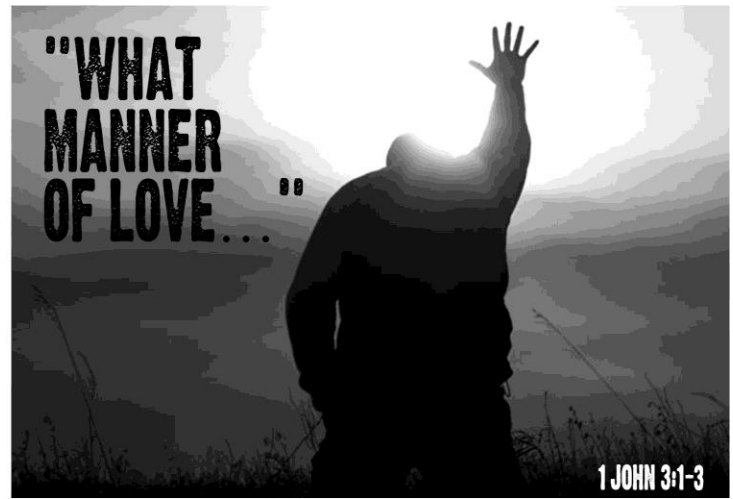
"What Manner of Love" 1John 3:1-3

by Pastor Tim Dodson

at Jesus Fellowship of Believers, Menomonie, Wisconsin

March 1st, 2015

1John 3:1-3 (1) *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.* (2) *Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.* (3) *And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*



The first 3 verses of 1John chapter 3 naturally create their own great ‘3-point sermon.’ Verse 1 would cover “What we *are*.” Verse 2, “What we *will be*,” and verse 3, “What we *should be*.” (credit to Dr Warren Wiersbe).

John has been long addressing in this letter the issue of proof and security of one’s salvation: *how we can know for sure we are a child of God, reborn, and adopted into His family.* But John ...pausing for a moment here, also seemed to want to be sure not to allude that the work and the power of salvation was in anyway wielded by the receiver of such grace. Chapter 3 herein begins with John waxing eloquent on the work of Christ and the love of God. We are reminded how we must daily embrace the fact that our salvation cannot be purchased, earned, or affected in anyway by us! Verse one begins with “**See how very much our Father loves us**, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are!”

All of what has occurred as to our salvation...all the redemption and the restoration and the joy and purpose of life...all of it has been bestowed upon us simply because God loves us! Indeed, there is responsibility and accountability and faithfulness involved on our part. But all of that is simply in acknowledgement...in *response* to that love, never an instigator or a catalyst of such! “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom 5:8) So He loved us and sent a rescue while we still were estranged from Him and were instead indulgent faithless rebels! The basis for all that has occurred concerning our salvation is the great love that God has for us!

The “tie that binds”...the bond of unity between us and our Creator is not works or effort or diligence. It is love! The problem with this is while God loves us perfectly, unilaterally, and unconditionally, we seldom reciprocate in that same light! In fact, we as Christians frankly often do not at all grasp the concept of “God love” and attempt rather to apply a human and earthly version of such to the relationship! One that is emotionally based and emotionally reflected, and honestly is effectively played out in mere verbal affirmation. Because we often do not wholly understand just what agape love is and the depth of it, we fail to be able to engage God in such a reciprocal love.

Frankly, for most of us, our ‘love of God’ is merely a repetitious mantra that is simply verbalized in religious dogma rather than something that grabs a hold of my heart, my brain, and my life to illicit a whole life response on my part. Jesus called upon us to ‘... *love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.*’ (Mark 12:30) That sounds very different than the version of ‘love’ that is so widely practiced in the greater church today...one that is self-serving, often lazy, fleshly and generally quite passive. Far from the love that “seeks first the kingdom of God.” One that

“loves our neighbor as ourselves.” Thus, unless we come to understand...at least on some level, the love God has for us, we will never be able to reciprocate God love for anyone else!

Look what Jesus had to say to the church at Ephesus. It is here that He truly ‘cuts to the chase’ emphasizing the importance of believers both **recalling to their mind** the love of God , as well as **conducting** themselves in light of that love! (Rev 2:1-4)...

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.

But (Introduces a radical change of direction in His exhortation!) I have this against you, that you have left (left, not lost!) your first love.

Note that Christ is not scolding or rejecting the deeds, the toils and the perseverance. But such can never be a replacement for love. It must always rather be in response to His love! Loving Him...*really loving in a Christ way*, is manifested in a passionate action...a faithful living in action. I have met many believers that claim to love Jesus but such is never reflected in motion and in practical manifest. For their loving fails to pass the 'horizontal' test of love toward others! That is not the love John is speaking of herein! The disturbing reality is that it is possible to think one is actively “serving God,” but without a true relationship with Him. It seems so often that time and circumstances often turn our hearts away from Him.

When Solomon grew old...

"...his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David (1Ki 11:4).

We must never allow our service (works) for Christ to be more important than our relationship with Him. Remember the story of Mary and her sister Martha in Luke. Martha’s priority was serving whereas Mary...sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word (Lk 10:39). Martha was so focused on serving that she missed the opportunity to be with Christ and to hear Him speak to her. Time spent sitting at the Master’s feet will never be a waste of time. Some folks tend to worry that such time spent reduces our service, but the result is actually the opposite. Our devotion, motivation, and understanding of God are deepened actually causing an increase in the fruit of God’s ministry through us.

Yet we struggle so often with this principle! We can feel that we must choose a dynamic expressed by sitting at the feet of Christ, or getting up and doing something. Again, as we see later in this chapter, John is not against *doing*. But our doing must, if it is to be real and fruitful, be a real reflection of our time with Him and our relationship with Him. John says in chapter 4 of this letter that God didn't just *say* He loves us, he actually loved us in action: "*In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that **God has sent His only begotten Son into the world**, (and why?) that we might **live through Him**.*" 1Jo 4:9

Steven Cole says this...

"Some things grow commonplace over time. We've heard about them and known them for years. Maybe at first, when it was new, an idea or experience affected us. But over the years, the effect grows weaker and weaker, until finally it's just a far-distant memory. But the Father's great love for us is the kind of experience that should grow stronger and stronger over the years, until it totally dominates every aspect of our lives. It should consume our thoughts and control our behavior. It should motivate us to serve God and to live holy lives. It should give us comfort in all our trials. It should fill us with the eager hope of being with Him in heaven. It should fill us with awe and worship, that He, the holy sovereign of the universe, would set His love on a sinful, self-willed rebel like me! "Amazing love, how can it be, that Thou, my God, should die for me!" Don't let yourself ever hear of the Father's great love and think, "Ho hum!" It ought always to amaze you."

God love...agape love, is unconditional, sacrificial love and Biblically refers to a love that God is (1Jn 4:8,16), that God demonstrates (Ro 5:8, Jn 3:16, 1Jn 4:9) and that God enables in His children. Agape may involve emotion, but it must always involve action. Agape is unrestricted, unrestrained, and unconditional. Agape love is the virtue that surpasses all others and in fact is the prerequisite for all the others. Jesus when asked "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" replied "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." "This is the great and foremost commandment." (Mt 22:36, 37, 38) (www.preceptaustin.com)

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13 that "*Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.*" Notice how that love is defined by verbs not adjectives!

John says to us "look at the love God pours out upon us!" A love that *gave*. A love that still today *gives and gives more*. The dictionary definition of **give** is "to pass or transfer the title or property of a thing to another person without an equivalent or compensation." This is how God's love comes to us, and how we are to give it out. Not just in an affirmation toward God but in a lifestyle toward others. And in the vein of this letter as a whole, this love manifest is not merely a Christian command but a fruit of the Spirit...a *proof that God is in us*.

John has already spoke about false confessors and little anti-christs that will arise around us. He speaks now concerning their hearts toward those that are true, those that are indeed "possessors." He says that they don't know us, because they don't know Him. Such explains much in our interaction with the world around us. If God is dwelling in us, we will always seem out of place and strange to them. They don't get it. They don't understand. They don't know who you are or what you are. You are merely an enigma. But few of us accept that premise and we try and we try with little success. The fact is they hate Jesus and they will most often hate you too. Intimate understanding and knowledge of another person is based upon fellowship. Since the people of the world have nothing in common with the **children of God**, they have no fellowship with them, and therefore have no appreciation and understanding of them.

Stephan received the brunt of such hatred. Moments before he was martyred at the hands of the religious folks of his days he told them this: "*You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? That's what your ancestors did, and so do you! Name one prophet your ancestors didn't persecute! They even killed the ones who predicted the coming of the Righteous One — the Messiah whom you betrayed and murdered. You deliberately disobeyed God's law, even though*

you received it from the hands of angels.” (Acts 7:51-53) They were doers of religious works and actions, but they never had a relationship with God, and thus they never really knew Him or His children! They never knew the "manner of love that God had bestowed." Why would we ever think we would receive any different response today? In fact, Christ warned us if we DO find acceptance out there! Luke 6:26-28 reminds us "*Woe to you when all men speak well of you, For so did their fathers to the false prophets.*" But we are not alleviated from the call to love them anyway...the same as God loved us when we still despised Him! "*But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.*"

The fact is, the more you are conformed to the image of Christ—the more separated you will be from the world, the less it will understand you.

While verse 1 tells us what we ARE, verse 2 tells us what we will be. You see, God’s love for us does not stop with our new birth. It continues throughout our lives and will carry us right up to the return of Jesus Christ! When our Lord returns, all true believers will see Him and will become like Him (Phil 3:20, 21). New bodies, and a new home. Until then, how shall we live? For we are, according to this verse, "sons of God" right now today. It does not begin when He returns, for that is when we are finished. As reborn believers, we are now "new creatures." Instead of constantly trying to achieve something or get to some high level in order to get to heaven, we need to realize that we are already children of God. It is done. "*It is finished.*" John wants to emphasize that this is **now** our current position, and therefore this great truth should dominate our thinking and transform every aspect of our daily lives. Our position and privilege as children of God should saturate and shape how we think, how we live, and how we relate to the world around us.

Dr Martyn-Lloyd Jones says the following: "*I do feel that this is perhaps the greatest weakness of all in the Christian church, that we fail to realize what we are, or who we are. We spend our time in arguing about the implications of the Christian truth or the application of this, that and the other. But the central thing is to realize what the Christian is. We grumble and complain, and it is all due to the fact that we have not really seen ourselves in terms of this picture. Surely, as we read these words, we must of necessity be humbled, indeed in a sense humiliated, as we realize the inadequacy of our ideas and the unworthiness of our view of ourselves as Christian people.*" (Lloyd-Jones, D. M. Children of God) Godly conduct rests on our understanding of our true, great position as children of God! It has been rightly said that imitation is the highest form of praise, and this transformation (*We will be like Him*) is the supreme tribute to Jesus Christ.

Verse 3 goes on to tell us what we SHOULD be, in light of all this great truth! "*...all who have this eager expectation will keep themselves pure, just as he is pure.*" You see, believers don't live holy lives to **prove** they are children of God, but they live holy lives **because** they are children of God. But make no mistake...our participation, as John has been saying throughout this letter, is crucial. We have all we need, now we are called to live in it! Once again, sanctification comes through the power of the saving grace of God, but we must play a part. Action motivated by His love, *our "response in love,"* and our ever deepening relationship with Him.

Scripture speaks of this ongoing cleansing as "progressive sanctification." In 1Pe 1:22 Peter says, "seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth" (ASV). That initial purification with its transforming result is the necessary precursor to the personal self-cleansing within our daily experience. The more intimate the believer's fellowship with God, who is "light" (1Jn 1:5), the more conscious he becomes of his need to cleanse himself from all that is darkness.