

Sermon Notes on I Jn. 4:11-16, Easter IV

1. Our text is the heart and center of I Jn. The noun "love" and the verb "to love" occur with high frequency in the writings of John.
2. Vs. 8 says "God is love." That is repeated in vs. 16. Love is God's primary attribute. The Bible does not say "God is justice" or "God is wrath" although those statements are true. But it does say "God is love."
3. Unconverted human nature does not know what love is. At Gal. 5:22 Paul lists nine fruits of the Holy Spirit. The first is love and the last is self-control. Of course the Bible recognizes that natural man has the affection of friendship, motherhood and brotherhood. But it is not genuine love. Rom. 5:6-10 reads "While we were still sinners, at the right time Christ died in the stead of the ungodly. Perhaps for a righteous man someone will die. Maybe for a good man someone may dare to die. But God commends His love to us in that while we were still sinners Christ died in our behalf. . . . For if while we were His enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, how much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved through His life." Natural man will die only for good people or good causes. God sent His Son to die for His enemies, for sinners, for those who did not deserve it.
4. Twice (vss. 8 and 16) we read "God is love." Then in vss. 9-10 John explains: God sent His only-begotten Son so that we might live through Him. He made payment for our sins though we did not love God. In vs. 16 John gives this sentence another application. Here it means that where God's love is, there is God.
5. Every serious Christian sooner or later asks himself: "Do I really know God and His love?" Look at vs. 15: "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God." And then he adds in vs. 16: "And we have come to know and believe the love which God has in us." Christians know better than unbelievers that they are sinners. Because they know the Law of God, their sins bother them more than they do the unbelievers. That is to be expected. But that is exactly why they can be sure that God and His love do really live in them. Christ died for the ungodly. That's you and me. Christ died for His enemies. That's you and me. God doesn't love "good" people as do unbelievers. God loves His enemies, the ungodly. I must live in constant repentance over my sin and then flee to the Gospel which assures me that my sins are forgiven.
6. Vs. 12 shows us how very, very important the love of God, the Gospel and its fruits, really are. "Nobody has ever seen God." Everyone will accept that statement. In heaven we will see Him as He really is. I Jn. 3:2. Christ has revealed God to us. Jn. 17:21. But we've never seen Him. How can we be sure that He is with us and in us? Now look at vss. 12-13. It all depends on love. Do we love each other? If so God remains in us and His love has reached its goal in us. Then in vs. 13 he says that we know that He remains in us and we in Him because He has given us the Holy Spirit which means the fruit of the Spirit, love. At this point you'll say "My love is so imperfect. I sin so much. How can I be sure?" That is why John adds vs. 14: "We (the apostles) have seen and therefore do now testify that the Father sent His Son AS THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD." When your sins bother you, flee to the love of God, the Gospel, for forgiveness of your sins. That's why He died for you.
7. At Jn. 17:21 Jesus prayed "that all might be one, just as you, Father, IN Me and I IN You, that they might be IN us." In vss. 12-16 of our text Jn. uses "IN" ten times. The Gospel of Jesus, the love of God, causes God to live in the believer and the believer lives in God. You have never seen Him but he's there. You've never seen the wind but you know it is there because you have the evidence. When you repent and believe, rest assured, God is in you and you in God.

Theme: GOD IS LOVE

Introduction: This sentence occurs twice in vss. 8 and 16. the word "love" is perhaps the most misused and abused word in the languages of the world. Men and women confess love for each other and then, in many cases, their marriages go awry. All cultures have their "love" songs but so much of it is insincere. Several times the NT gives us a list of the fruits and works of the flesh, natural, unconverted man. Love is never one of its fruits or works.

I-This Sentence Implies That I Am Not Love

A-The first man born into the world was a murderer. We all know the account of Cain and Abel. Cain was the firstborn. But he hated his brother, Abel, so much that he killed him. But what was worse than that, he did not confess his sin. Even in the OT it was true that he who confessed his sin could be forgiven. God had to hunt for Cain and tell him about his sin. Even then Cain did not confess his sin. He thought it was too great to be forgiven.

B-All others born after Cain are murderers just like Cain. I Jn. 3:15 tells us "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." Do you ever have hatred for anyone? Gal. 5:19 reads: "The works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries." Are we ever guilty of these sins? Who can deny it? The only point we are making here is that love does not begin with human beings. By nature they are God's enemies. Rom. 5:10. By nature we are ungodly and without strength. Rom. 5:6. Love does not begin with us.

II-This Sentence Is Our Only Hope

A-God proved it by sending His Son into the world. This is mentioned twice in vss. 9 and 10. He sent His Son so that we might live through Him. To know Jesus is to know and have eternal life. He sent His Son to make payment for our sins. He takes away the sin of the world. I am a Christian but I still sin daily and, very often, grievously. I hate people I should love. I despise people I should respect. I lust for people who are not rightfully mine. Does love ever begin with me? Never. It begins only with God Who sent His only-begotten Son to forgive our sins and grant us everlasting life.

B-Despite our sins, we love one another. We do for each other what we want others to do for us. Why? God loved us first. And when we love one another God's love is brought to its goal in us. This love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit as our text says in vs. 14 and as St. Paul says at Gal. 5:22. It is the first and greatest gift of the Spirit. And I Cor. 13 describes it.

C-We have two proofs that God lives in us: 1) Vs. 16 says: "God is love and he who remains in this love (the Gospel; this message) God lives in him and he in God." It is very important that I constantly hear the Gospel. 2) Vs. 12 tells us: "If we love one another, God remains in us and His love is brought to maturity in us." We have much sin to confess. We do not love as we should, but WE DO LOVE. And that is a proof that God does truly live in us.

Conclusion: Are your sins frightening you? Confess them and return to the love of God in Christ for forgiveness. Do you, at times, feel weak in the faith in Jesus? Confess this to your Lord and return to the love of God which assures you that while you were still weak, God's enemy, a sinner, God sent His only-begotten Son to take that sin away. Christ did not die for good people. Christ died for helpless sinners who are in great need of His love.