

ST ARMANDS KEY LUTHERAN CHURCH
SARASOTA, FLORIDA

COME, JOIN THE CONVERSATION!
ON
THE EPISTLES OF JOHN

Lesson Plan for Thursday – March 27, 2014

CONVERSATION #8 – “Walking in Love”
I JOHN 4:1-21

Our objectives for this session:

- to share ideas, attitudes, and experiences relating to the message proclaimed by John; and, in doing so, strengthen our SAKLC fellowship;
- to examine and discuss proper “*tests*” for examining the source of all religious teaching and proclamation;
- to point to some important statements of Christian faith used in the Lutheran Church and some other church bodies;
- to distinguish between several concepts/words used in the Holy Bible, and in speech, to describe “love,” and to underscore the importance of **Agápe**.

OPENING PASTORAL PRAYER and SHARING GOD’S PEACE

FACILITATOR’S INITIAL COMMENT ON TODAY’S SCRIPTURAL TEXT:

In considering today’s biblical text, one of the first things to recognize as people of faith is that there is a spiritual realm beyond what we can see and touch in the created universe. Otherwise, why would we need faith?

The apostle Paul wrote, ***“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”*** (Ephesians 6:12)

Remember what Jesus told Nicodemus, ***“I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.”*** (John 3:5-6)

Many of the forces shaping our 21st century world, like the forces that have been at work since the time of the Garden of Eden, are spiritual in nature. There are powerful, deceptive forces; evil (*satanic*) forces that will do anything just to lead one of God's children away from Him. So it is essential that we test the ‘*spirits*’ that we hear and feel speaking to us. It is not enough to

follow what sounds like the Word of God, just because it comes from a best-selling book advertised as being “religious;” a motion picture or TV program based on a biblical theme; an article defined as spiritual in the printed media; or, words spoken by someone claiming to be a self-educated independent ‘preacher.’ It is not enough to accept as religious “truth” all manner of postings on the internet, Twitter, and etcetera. This is the message John seems to be proclaiming to his 1st century Christian “children in faith,” in the passage that immediately follows:

A) THE SCRIPTURAL RECORD –I JOHN 4:1–6 “TESTING THE SPIRITS . . . REJECTING THE WORLD”

Dear friends, don't believe every spirit. Test the spirits to see if they are from God because many false prophets have gone into the world. ² This is how you know if a spirit comes from God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come as a human is from God, ³ and every spirit that doesn't confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and is now already in the world. ⁴ You are from God, little children, and you have defeated these people because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. ⁵ They are from the world. So they speak from the world's point of view and the world listens to them. ⁶ We are from God. The person who knows God listens to us. Whoever is not from God doesn't listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error. [COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE TRANSLATION]

Beloved, do not put faith in every spirit, but prove (test) the spirits to discover whether they proceed from God; for many false prophets have gone forth into the world. ² By this you may know (perceive and recognize) the Spirit of God: every spirit which acknowledges and confesses [the fact] that Jesus Christ (the Messiah) [actually] has become man and has come in the flesh is of God [has God for its source]; ³ And every spirit which does not acknowledge and confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh [but would annul, destroy, sever, disunite Him] is not of God [does not proceed from Him]. This [non-confession] is the [spirit] of the antichrist, [of] which you heard that it was coming, and now it is already in the world. ⁴ Little children, you are of God [you belong to Him] and have [already] defeated and overcome them [the agents of the antichrist], because He Who lives in you is greater (mightier) than he who is in the world. ⁵ They proceed from the world and are of the world; therefore it is out of the world [its whole economy morally considered] that they speak, and the world listens (pays attention) to them. ⁶ We are [children] of God. Whoever is learning to know God [progressively to perceive, recognize, and understand God by observation and experience, and to get an ever-clearer knowledge of Him] listens to us; and he who is not of God does not listen or pay attention to us. By this we know (recognize) the Spirit of Truth and the spirit of error. [THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE]

A REVIEW OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT: These verses provide for us a requirement to **TEST** the source of all religious teaching.

1. Our forebears, Adam and Eve, “*flunked*” that Test! Remember the opening chapters of Genesis and the ancient story of creation? Satan appeared to Adam and Eve as a serpent, craftier than any of the wild animals God had created. Satan claimed a knowledge superior to God, and our first parents “*bought it!*” (cf. **Genesis 3:1-5** - *The snake was the most intelligent of all the wild animals that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say that you shouldn’t eat from any tree in the garden?”*² *The woman said to the snake, “We may eat the fruit of the garden’s trees*³ *but not the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden. God said, ‘Don’t eat from it, and don’t touch it, or you will die.’”*⁴ *The snake said to the woman, “You won’t die!*⁵ *God knows that on the day you eat from it, you will see clearly and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”*)
2. **Deuteronomy 13:1-5**, provides the “*acid*” test of determining who were false prophets and false gods under provisions of the Old Covenant: “*Now if a prophet or a dream interpreter appears among you and performs a sign or wonder for you,*² *and the sign or wonder that was spoken actually occurs; if he says: “Come on! We should follow other gods”—ones you haven’t experienced—“and we should worship them,”*³ *you must not listen to that prophet’s or dream interpreter’s words, because the LORD your God is testing you to see if you love the LORD your God with all your mind and all your being.*⁴ *You must follow the LORD your God alone! Revere him! Follow his commandments! Obey his voice! Worship him! Cling to him—no other!*⁵ *That prophet or dream interpreter must be executed because he encouraged you to turn away from the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, who redeemed you from the house of slavery; they tried to lead you away from the path the LORD your God commanded you to take. Remove such evil from your community!”*
3. John, in his epistle, is claiming that the antichrists and the ultimate antichrist, and the evil force which is behind them deny Jesus’ true nature. Their teaching was: “*He is not God ... He is not Man ... He did not mean what He said ... You don’t have to believe only in Him*” ... etc. These false prophets, inspired by evil spirits, were Gnostics; they denied that Jesus Christ was a full human being. For them the body and physical matter were evil, and so they could not see how God, who is pure, could take on a physical body. For them the idea of “*the Word made flesh*” was impossible. Their points: “*listen to us, not to Jesus; listen to our view of God, not to Jesus’ proclamation about God; accept our view of reality, not Jesus’ teaching; love as the world loves, not as Jesus loves.*” Interestingly, the Apostle, John, and the writer of **Deuteronomy**, did not say we can tell false spirits by their works, but by their message!

4. Nor, did John say that every false spirit necessarily denies Jesus completely. A defining Greek word that John uses in verses 2 – 3 is ὁμολογέω (**hōmōlōgēō**), it means literally: **“together”** (*homo*) **“words”** (*logeo*). The idea is that of a **“confession”** or an **“agreement/statement of faith.”** (When “words”/thoughts of humans are joined *“together”* there is an agreement of faith.) So every spirit that does not agree with what we know about Jesus from the teaching of Scripture is not from God. The sense of John’s statement is not just that they say, *“Jesus has come in the flesh,”* but that they agree with all that we know about His coming. Sometimes heretical teaching masks its deviations from the truth by simply failing to affirm important biblical truths. Rather than proclaiming, *“Jesus is not the Christ,”* they fail to affirm that *“He is the Christ.”* True Christians, those who possess the Holy Spirit and testify to his strength to overcome evil, always confess that God has become man in Jesus Christ.
5. These heretical Gnostic teachings, taken to the next step, affirm that in the world it's **“me first.”** They can never quite accept that in the Kingdom of God, it's **“you first.”**
6. William Barclay in his Commentary on the Epistles of John, cited in some of our earlier study sessions, makes an important point when he writes, **“How can a man/woman whose watchword is COMPETITION (with others) even begin to understand an ethic whose key-note is SERVICE (to others)?”**

FOR GROUP CONVERSATION:

1. What should every Christian believer do when he/she sits under the ministry of a teacher or preacher? Is this as necessary in today’s world, as when the Apostle John lived?
2. What test(s) does the Apostle John advocate be used to test teachers and what they teach?
3. How do those living in contemporary society characteristically react to ‘false teachers’? Why is this so? In our present society, where are we likely to encounter “false” teaching?
4. How may the spirit of truth and the spirit of error be determined in today’s world?
5. What is the importance of continuing to teach, use and make reference to the ancient creeds and confessions of the Church?
6. Do you find any relevance in William Barclay’s distinction (see #6 above) between being in *“competition with others”* and having an ethic of *“service to others?”* Is it possible for a Christian to experience resolution between these 2 viewpoints about life?

B) THE SCRIPTURAL RECORD –I JOHN 4:7-21 “HUMAN and DIVINE LOVE”

⁷ *Dear friends, let's love each other, because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born from God and knows God.* ⁸ *The person who doesn't love does not know God, because God is love.* ⁹ *This is how the love of God is revealed to us: God has sent his only Son into the world so that we can live through him.* ¹⁰ *This is love: it is not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son as the sacrifice that deals with our sins.*

¹¹ *Dear friends, if God loved us this way, we also ought to love each other.* ¹² *No one has ever seen God. If we love each other, God remains in us and his love is made perfect in us.* ¹³ *This is how we know we remain in him and he remains in us, because he has given us a measure of his Spirit.* ¹⁴ *We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the savior of the world.* ¹⁵ *If any of us confess that Jesus is God's Son, God remains in us and we remain in God.* ¹⁶ *We have known and have believed the love that God has for us.*

God is love, and those who remain in love remain in God and God remains in them. ¹⁷ *This is how love has been perfected in us, so that we can have confidence on the Judgment Day, because we are exactly the same as God is in this world.* ¹⁸ *There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear expects punishment. The person who is afraid has not been made perfect in love.* ¹⁹ *We love because God first loved us.* ²⁰ *If anyone says, I love God, and hates a brother or sister, he is a liar, because the person who doesn't love a brother or sister who can be seen can't love God, who can't be seen.* ²¹ *This commandment we have from him: Those who claim to love God ought to love their brother and sister also.* [COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE]

⁷ ***Beloved, let us love one another, for love is*** (springs) ***from God; and he who loves*** [his fellowmen] ***is begotten*** (born) ***of God and is coming*** [progressively] ***to know and understand God*** [to perceive and recognize and get a better and clearer knowledge of Him]. ⁸ ***He who does not love has not become acquainted with God*** [does not and never did know Him], ***for God is love.*** ⁹ ***In this the love of God was made manifest*** (displayed) ***where we are concerned: in that God sent His Son, the only begotten or*** ^[f] ***unique*** [Son], ***into the world so 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 to be the propitiation*** (the atoning sacrifice) ***for our sins.***

¹¹ ***Beloved, if God loved us so*** [very much], ***we also ought to love one another.*** ¹² ***No man has at any time*** [yet] ***seen God. But if we love one another, God abides*** (lives and remains) ***in us and His love*** (that love which is essentially His) ***is brought to completion*** (to its full maturity, runs its full course, is perfected) ***in us!*** ¹³ ***By this we come to know*** (perceive, recognize, and understand) ***that we abide*** (live and remain) ***in Him and He in us: because He has given*** (imparted) ***to us of His*** [Holy] ***Spirit.*** ¹⁴ ***And*** [besides] ***we ourselves have seen*** (have deliberately and steadfastly contemplated) ***and bear witness that the Father has sent***

the Son [as the] **Savior of the world.** ¹⁵ **Anyone who confesses** (acknowledges, owns) **that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides** (lives, makes His home) **in him and he** [abides, lives, makes his home] **in God.** ¹⁶ **And we know** (understand, recognize, are conscious of, by observation and by experience) **and believe** (adhere to and put faith in and rely on) **the love God cherishes for us.**

God is love, and he who dwells and continues in love dwells and continues in God, and God dwells and continues in him. ¹⁷ **In this** [union and communion with Him] **love is brought to completion and attains perfection with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment** [with assurance and boldness to face Him], **because as He is, so are we in this world.** ¹⁸ **There is no fear in love** [dread does not exist], **but full-grown** (complete, perfect) **love** ^[g] **turns fear out of doors and expels every trace of terror! For fear** ^[h] **brings with it the thought of punishment, and** [so] **he who is afraid has not reached the full maturity of love** [is not yet grown into love's complete perfection]. ¹⁹ **We love Him, because He first loved us.** ²⁰ **If anyone says, I love God, and hates** (detests, abominates) **his brother** ^[i] **in Christ, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, Whom he has not seen.** ²¹ **And this command** (charge, order, injunction) **we have from Him: that he who loves God shall love his brother** ^[i] **believer] also.** [THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE]

SOME OBSERVATIONS ABOUT "LOVE":

God has given many commands in His Word, but Jesus condensed all of them into just two: love God and love neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40). John understood this and repeatedly called his readers to love one another. For Jesus, love and obedience were the same thing (John 14:15-24). He loves the Father, so He obeys the Father. The Father loves Him, so he gives Him whatever He requests. In the same way, we love Jesus, so we obey Jesus. The Father loves us when we love Jesus, so the Father gives us whatever we ask in Jesus' name.

It is vitally important to be clear about what we mean when we use the word "love." It is even more important to be clear about what John, and Jesus, meant when they used the word. Ancient Greek has four distinct words for love: **Agápe**, **Éros**, **Philia**, and **Storgē**. The sense in which each of these words were generally used is given below:

- **Agápe** (α γ ά π η agapē) means "love" in modern day Greek. In ancient biblical Greek, it refers to a general affection or deeper sense of "**true love**" rather than the attraction suggested by "eros".

- **Agápe** is used by NT writers in the way Jesus described His obedience to the Father, and His work on the cross. Thus, the word has sometimes been translated *“sacrificial love.”* St. Paul defined it that way in what is known as the *“Love chapter”*. *“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”* (1 Cor. 13:4-8a) Some call it *“other-centered love,”* to distinguish it from the various kinds of self-centered love which are based on feelings, or a sense of duty or honor.
 - In the NT, the word **Agápe** is used more than 250 times in its various forms. It is used most often by St. Paul. Next, in making use of it is the Apostle John, who uses the word 97 times!
 - The most succinct : definition of **Agápe** comes from John. The statement: *“God is love”* (verses 8 & 16) is recognized as one of the greatest statements of divine revelation in the entire Bible!
 - Logically, the statement stands parallel with *'God is light'* and *'God is spirit'* as one of the three great Johannine expression of the nature of God. . . . *'God is spirit'* describes His metaphysical nature, while *'God is light'* and *'God is love'* deal with His character, especially as He has revealed himself to men.
- **Éros** (ἐρως erōs) is passionate love, with sensual desire and longing.
 - **Philia** (φιλία philia) means friendship in modern Greek. It is a dispassionate virtuous love, a concept developed by Aristotle.
 - **Storge** (στοργή storgē) means "affection" in ancient and modern Greek. It is natural affection, like that felt by parents for offspring.

A CLOSER LOOK AT SPECIFIC POINTS WHICH ARE MADE IN THIS BIBLICAL TEXT:

- a) **Verse 7** – All genuine love has its source in God!
- b) **Verses 7-8** – Love enters the human heart when a person begins to know God and to enjoy the salvation God provides. As that person loves others she/he grows in the knowledge of God. Love begins in God; then, enters human lives. Absence of love for others is an indication of not really being acquainted with (loving) God.
- c) **Verse 9** – God’s love is seen most wonderfully in the Incarnation. We do not deserve such love; rather we deserve judgment; but God entered into our cosmic space and time in order to enable us to love Him.

- d) **Verses 11-12** – This great example of God, and the presence of the Spirit in our hearts/minds, should lead us to love others. As people see us loving one another they will begin to “see” God who is invisible. In loving attitudes and actions God is “seen.”
- e) **Verses 17-18** – God’s love in the heart/mind of a Christian removes fear: fear of judgment; fear of the future; fear of other humans; and, fear of the devil.
- f) **Verses 7, 11, 20, 21** – Love of God and love of people are closely connected in the Christian life. The one should lead to the other!

FURTHER QUESTIONS FOR GROUP CONVERSATION:

1. In what ways do “LOVE” as used in the First Epistle of John, and “love” as used in popular speech today, differ?
2. What are the particular “fears” of contemporary people? How does the love of God banish these fears?
3. The statements collectively made in I JOHN 4 are very strong; In what way may the believer prove his/her love for God whom she/he has never seen?
4. Why can a person who does not love others not know God?
5. How can we know that God dwells in us? What happens to that indwelling love of Christ?
6. What is the special relationship between the one who dwells in love and God?
7. People who fear what God will do to them or have them do for Him are not fully convinced of what fact?
8. What is our position at the final judgment because of our love for God?

THE FOCUS OF NEXT WEEK’S STUDY: I JOHN 5:1-12 “FAITH and ASSURANCE”

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