

In our lesson last week (4:7-10) was introduced the blockbuster “headline” of “God is love,” found nowhere else in the Scripture so simply stated. This wonderful revelation of God’s nature is the overriding truth that consumes the remainder of 1 John 4, and even into chapter 5. The remainder of chapter 4 is John’s teaching on various aspects of the implications of “God is Love.” And in today’s passage, we get divine teaching on the perfect fulfillment of “God is love.” It is a story for the ages, and I want to tell it to you. Let’s get to it.

1 John 4:11-14 *Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.*

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

Yet once again, John begins this passage addressing his readers as “beloved,” which we have previously noted is better and literally rendered, “little born ones.” He is speaking to his Christian brothers and sisters. And once again, he urges, “*we ought to love one another.*” And this is based upon the fact that “God is love,” having loved us first.

This is now the third time that John, in this letter, has taught the importance of Christians loving one another. But even before this, Jesus had taught the same in the upper room the night of His betrayal, when He said (two times):

John 13:34 *A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*

John 15:12 *This is my commandment that you love one another, just as I have loved you.*

Here we see the COMMANDMENT of loving one another – reason enough, to be sure. But John in his epistle of 1 John gives us additional and increasingly meaningful reasons to love one another.

John’s first urging to “love one another” in 1 John was in 2:10.

1 John 2:10 *The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him.*

Here we see the PURITY of loving one another – that in loving one another with the “apape” love of God there is no “darkness” or impure motives. This is even a more noble reason to love one another than simply out of commandment, but out of walking in God’s light of purity.

But then in 3:11 and 3:16 we have another teaching of John on loving one another.

1 John 3:11 *For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.*

1 John 3:16 *We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*

Here we see the OBLIGATION of loving one another - “*we should love*” and “*we ought to lay down our lives.*” The motivations here are that we don’t want to be like Cain who hated his brother. (2:12) And we don’t want to hate our brother by seeing a need and closing our heart. (2:17) The correct obligation to our fellow man is to love, as Christ loved.

These are all valid and motivational reasons to love one another:

1. COMMANDMENT
2. PURITY
3. OBLIGATION

But John has saved the “best” and ultimate reason for last. But it comes as a bit of a puzzle.

THE PIECES OF THE PUZZLE

In 4:12 and 13 we see some interesting pieces of truth that at first glance might seem not to fit together so well. This was my first thought as I read this passage. Each makes sense by itself, but what sense do they make as a unit? And how do they relate to “God is love?”

1. No one has seen God at any time (yes, but how does that fit here?)
2. If we love one another, God abides in us (yes, we have heard this already)
3. God’s love is perfected in us (what exactly does this mean?)
4. He has given us of His Spirit (true, but again, how does this fit here?)

So here are the pieces. Let me now attempt to put the pieces together in a timeless story of God’s love, and how it is perfected through our loving of one another.

THE TALE OF LOVE PERFECTED

In eternity past, God existed as a three-part spirit being, Father, Son and Spirit. God is love – always in the present tense, so from eternity past, God is (was) love. That love was expressed to Himself, Father to Son, Son to Spirit and Spirit to Father. But love always wants to express itself further, reaching beyond itself. So “God is love” is the answer to creation. Love was reaching beyond itself for someone else to love. God created man in His image, that He might extend His love. And God loved, but man rejected and ignored and misplaced the love given.

God, in love, wanted to dwell with the objects of His affection. This desire is also answered by “God is love.” He walked and talked with Adam and Eve, but they rebelled. He talked with Noah and Abraham, despite their failings. He appeared to Moses as a burning bush, and then allowed Moses to see His back in a physical form. Then He wanted to be nearer His people Israel, than just walk with their leaders. So He had Moses build a portable tabernacle, where God would dwell in His glory in the Holy of Holies of that tent. He appeared to His people as both a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, that He might guide them through the wilderness. “God is love” is also the answer to God’s providence – His desire to shepherd His people.

During Solomon’s reign, God called the king to build a permanent temple in which God would dwell in Jerusalem. This was God’s home on earth for some 1000 years.

When Jesus came on the earthly scene, God in flesh, God dwelt in Jesus – the first human in which God ever lived, or could live. And as such, God walked among men for those 3+ decades:

John 1:14 *And the Word became flesh, and dwelt [literally: “tabernacled”] among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

John 1:18 *No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.*

And through Jesus, God was able to express and extend His love to mankind. And when Jesus was taken to heaven, God returned at Pentecost in the form of the Holy Spirit, who dwelt in, and has dwelt in, the lives of each follower of Jesus from that day forward. He is able to live in the hearts of men, because born-again believers have been sanctified (made holy) by the atoning blood of Jesus.

1 Corinthians 3:16 *Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*

Jesus, though God in flesh, was only one ray of God’s love (though a bright one to be sure!). That is why Jesus taught his disciples:

John 16:7 *But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.*

John 14:12 *Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father.*

Jesus was only one bright ray of God’s love, but now with the Holy Spirit living in millions of Christians, God’s love has millions of ways to extend His love to the world. As believers love one another and extend that love even to the unbelieving world, God’s love has been fulfilled, completed

and perfected! “God is love” has come to its fullness on earth, which has been God’s plan from the beginning. And God is able to dwell in intimacy with His beloved children of faith, tabernacling with them from the inside of their being, and extending His love through them to the world of people He created to love.

PUTTING THE PUZZLE PIECES TOGETHER

So “God is love” is the beginning of it all.

Beloved, since God so loved us, we ought to love one another. That’s verse 11.

But how?

No one has seen God at any time. That’s the first part of verse 12. Yet He has ever wanted to express His love and dwell with His people. Despite his various appearances by theophany in the Old Testament, and His brief visit to earth in the veiled humanity of Jesus, He has been invisible.

Until God gave His Holy Spirit to live in and through the lives of believers. That’s verse 13.

Now when we Christians choose to love one another (and it is a choice), we know that God abides in us making it possible to do so. That’s the middle part of verse 12.

And when we let our light shine, the light of God’s love in us, God’s love is perfected in us. That’s the last part of verse 12. And “perfected” can just as easily be translated “completed” or “fulfilled.”

And the God of love, who is love by nature, is finally able to express Himself in love to many, while being in intimate relationship with His people by living in them.

IN CONCLUSION

So here is the “order” of the age-old tale of love, “puzzle pieces” of our passage put together:

1. God is love
2. God is unseen
3. God abides in us, by the Holy Spirit
4. We choose to love one another
5. God’s love is perfected (“fulfilled”) in us

And God’s brilliant light of love is loosed through the prism of millions of believers who reflect that love, by choice, by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Please note, that the only step that can thwart God’s love being perfected in and through you is your choice to allow it.

So may we indeed choose always to love, motivated by:

1. COMMANDMENT (motive enough)
2. PURITY (additional motivation)
3. OBLIGATION (stronger motivation)
4. PERFECTION of God’s purpose (ultimate motivation)

Do you now realize that as you choose to love one another, you are fulfilling and realizing God’s eternal joy of reaching millions with His love, through the intimacy of relationship with His children?

Yes, you and I can be a part of God’s “Love Perfected!” Amen!