

**Christ Community Covenant Church**  
**The Little Letters: The Epistles of John**  
**"The Greatest of These is Love"**  
**Pastor Dave Scherrer - April 10, 2011**

**Famous Love stories/Film**

An Affair to Remember - Cary Grant and Deborah Kerr, Sleepless in Seattle, Titanic, Romeo and Juliet, Gone with the Wind, Jane Eyre, A Beautiful Life – Roberto Benigni, Anna Karenna

**Love songs**

When I fall in love, What's forever for?

**What about famous love letters?**



This is the oldest love letter known in the world a 4000 years old cuneiform love letter. It is addressed to the Sumerian king Shu-Sin, and it is a love poem of a princess that is to be wed to the king: *Bridegroom, dear to my heart, Goodly is your beauty, honeysweet, Lion, dear to my heart, Goodly is your beauty, honeysweet. You have captivated me, Let me stand tremblingly before you. Bridegroom, I would be taken by you to the bedchamber, You have captivated me, Let me stand tremblingly before you.*

Did you know that God writes love letters? Song of Solomon is one such "love letter". This little letter is one too. The writer John composes a passionate love note to his churches and fills it with God's love for them. Over and over, 51 times in all, love is mentioned. John is kind of the Love Doctor of the first century.

Most scholars believe that this book is written by the apostle John; "the disciple whom Jesus loved." The same John wrote the account of Jesus' life called the *Gospel of John*. And we are also familiar with John as the writer of the book of Revelation at the end of the Bible.

It is a book of contrasts; light and dark in chapter one, love of the world and love of God in chapter 2, there is the contrast of children of God and children of the devil in chapter 3, the Spirit of God and the spirit of Antichrist in chapter 4 and then love and fear or love and hate in four and five. Interesting.

But more than anything, these letters are personal letters. I admit this first letter has a bit of a 'sermon' feel to it. It is written by John the Elder as he calls himself in 2 and 3 John (2 John 1, 3 John 1) Elder literally means "the old man" so it doesn't surprise me that it has the feel of a lecture, even if he calls his readers 'little children.' But John could be in his late 70's to mid 80's when he writes these words.

I like it that while this sermon is strong in teaching content yet it doesn't have a bunch of 'dos and don'ts'. More it has the flavor of "Done!" This gift of love has done so much for us and John challenges us to live in the light of that marvelous love.

One of the reasons I see for theologians to consider this to be the work of the apostle is the similarity of the themes between the Gospel and this work:

***In the beginning . . . Genesis 1:1, John 1:1-5, 1 John 1:1-4***

This ties it together for me that it is the same author.

***Faith – Hope – Love: The greatest of these is love***

***1 Corinthians 13:4-13 (ESV)***

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant<sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;<sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.<sup>7</sup> Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.<sup>9</sup> For we know in part and we prophesy in part,<sup>10</sup> but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.<sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.<sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

John writes about the deepest theme of scripture. This Bible is all about God and God, John tells us is Love. Not only does God love us in the verb fashion, but He is love in the noun fashion. And He expects us to be love too.

***Love for each other is the badge of Christianity***

This is a love letter telling us we need to love better. John is telling the churches of Asia Minor that we are to be different than the rest of the world. They are to know us by our 'agape' – our unconditional love. John spoke of this ***in his gospel***.

***John 13:34–35***

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

I personally kind of like it when people put various Jesus stickers on their cars and wear crosses and put "Hope in God" signs in house windows—but if you ask Jesus, "What's the mark of a Christian that will set them off and help the world know that they are your disciples?" - His answer would be—his answer was—"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (vs 35). Love for each other in the church is the badge of Christianity. Francis Schaeffer agreed with me:

"Through the centuries men have displayed many different symbols to show that they are Christians. They have worn marks in the lapels of their coats, hung chains about their necks, and even had special haircuts.

Of course, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with any of this, but there is a much better sign -- a mark that has not been thought up just as a matter of expediency for use on some special occasion. It is a universal mark that is to last through all the ages of the church until Jesus comes back. What is this mark? Knowing that He is about to leave, Jesus prepares His disciples for what is to come. It is here that He makes clear what will be the distinguishing mark of the Christian.

"A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also

love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (John 13:34-35) *Francis Schaeffer - The Mark of a Christian*

In the book of Acts Luke is eager to show that one of the first effects of salvation and community life in Christ is practical, costly care for one another. Acts 2:24: "They began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need." In other words, meeting needs in the church was more important than personal possession. This is very God-like. Recall he is so full and content that he is by nature LOVE—giving, caring, helping, supporting, protecting. Love among Christians is the mark of Christ in the church.

We also see a love language that defines love in a very special way. Abiding.

**Act of Marriage illustration** – God made marriage to help us understand the idea of abiding. Marriage is the closest thing we get, as imperfect as we have made it, of understanding this idea. And it is important because God abides in the one who loves him and confesses Jesus Christ.

### ***God abides in the one who loves and the one who confesses***

1 John 3:23-24 tells us that there is a mutual oneness with God for those who believe in and confess Christ. Abiding.

***<sup>23</sup>And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. <sup>24</sup>Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.***

I feel very strong about abiding. That is because Jesus felt strong about this idea. Abiding is at once the answer to sin and the answer to legalism. It is one of my favorite words of scripture. The Greek word for "abide" is *Paramenó* (par-am-en'-o), a verb that has the meaning of to not just casually hanging out, or stay for a while but it means to remain, to be true to, to persevere, to remain near. It is also translated other times in the first century as "continue, endure, lasting, living, remain, staying, and waiting."

You see the Gospel is a function of God abiding with us. His unshaken purpose is to rescue us from ourselves by coming Himself from heaven. But not to just set us free then leave, but to stay and continue to set us free. John tells us this is the Gospel:

### ***The Gospel***

#### ***1 John 4: 9-10***

***<sup>9</sup>In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup>In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.***

God was manifest among us. Abiding. And He stays here alongside us because He wants us to *know Him* - really know Him! John is taken with this idea of knowing:

2:3—By this we may be sure that we know him . . .  
2:5b—By this we may be sure that we are in him . . .  
3:10—By this it may be seen who are the children of God . . .  
3:14—We know that we have passed out of death into life . . .  
3:19—By this we shall know that we are of the truth . . .  
3:24b—By this we know that he abides in us . . .  
4:2—By this you know the Spirit of God . . .

5:13—I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you might know that you have eternal life.

God wants us **to know**, beyond a shadow of a doubt that we are to abide in Him and He in us and that is salvation, when the Holy Spirit lives in us. And it necessarily means that we will tell others of our love:

**1 John 4:15**

**Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.**

**Confessing Jesus is basic Christianity**

Confessing Jesus as the Son of God is basic Christianity not advanced Christianity. When John says here that the evidence of abiding in God is that we confess that Jesus is the Son of God, he means that the confession is the evidence that you are saved. When John says, "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God," he does not mean that whoever signs up for the softball team hits a homerun. He means that whoever signs up for the softball team is on the softball team.

Abiding in God is being on the team. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God is saved and God abides in them. And this confession has a particular look to it; there is a particular response that comes from being saved. You may be early in your journey with Christ and a bit tentative of confessing Christ. But there is no compromising with Christ. We are to witness, to testify, to confess – with our lives and our lips. Some say I let my deeds and life speak for me. That is good truly. But God has asked us to confess with our lips too. In a Spirit led obedient way. And there is another response as well, a very essential primary response to the Gospel.

**The Gospel Response**

**1 John 4:11-12**

**<sup>11</sup>Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup>No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.**

There are some who say, I love God but I don't love the church. I don't like Christians. You know what, that isn't a biblical attitude. Hard as it may be sometimes to love each other, it is a non-negotiable. Somehow by loving one another well, we perfect our love for God.

According to verse 12, the closest to seeing God on earth will be through the love of the church. When Jesus said "blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God," He meant it. God is here in the love of the saints. Do you see Him?

**The Gospel Relationship**

The Gospel relationship is to abide, to be content and fearless in your love of God and others.

**1 John 4:16-19**

We have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. <sup>17</sup>By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. <sup>18</sup>There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. <sup>19</sup>We love because he first loved us.

You see this is a confident relationship you and I can have with each other, not a timid one. We are not to be walking on egg shells with each other. We need not feel that way with God. "I hope

he loves me today. I hope I did enough of the right things so that he loves me more.” The love song God will never sing is “I love you more today than yesterday, but not as much as tomorrow.” That is a human trait. God gives us fearless love that compels us. He gives us a fearless assurance of His love.

### **Fearless Assurance**

**1 John 5:1, 13**

**Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. <sup>13</sup>I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.**

There is fearless assurance and then there is also fearless obedience:

### **Fearless Obedience**

He asks us to be radically and fearlessly obedient, without fear of the human consequences of obeying Him:

**1 John 2:1-6**

**<sup>1</sup>My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. <sup>2</sup>He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. <sup>3</sup>And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. <sup>4</sup>Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, <sup>5</sup>but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: <sup>6</sup>whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.**

You see we love God and so we obey Him, not out of obligation or some misplaced idea that I have to earn this love. Radical obedience is an act of love. Finally there is Fearless Love.

### **Fearless Love where perfect love casts out fear**

**1 John 4:18**

**There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.**

Love that risks all for the church and for the lost. A love that hold nothing back. Do you hold back on God? Or is your love lavish like His love for you. All of us hold on to things, we have attachments and addictions. We do it out of fear and insecurity. Fearing that we won't have enough money or that our real character and motives will be exposed. But God is saying, "Let me have these fears, let my perfect love cast them out and and I will show you what real love and faith and hope look like!"

### **Conclusion**

One of the main reasons why so many professing Christians have little confidence with God and little boldness with men is that their lives are not devoted in love to the love of the church and the salvation of the lost and to the glory of God, but instead are devoted to providing earthly security and comfort for themselves and their families.

Our confidence before God on the Day of Judgment is based on the covering blood of Jesus as the atoning force that takes away all our sins, AND on a certain kind of "walk"— a walk of love. Not because this walk atones for our sins at all, but because it confirms the genuineness of our

faith. It confirms that we are in fact savingly related to Christ, that he in fact abides in us and we trust his words that he “will never leave us nor forsake us.”

### **Prayer**

April 10, 2011, Lectio Divina (during time of worship)

#### **1 Corinthians 13:4-13 (ESV)**

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