

9/17/23 Christ Fellowship

The Love Test – 1 John 4:7-12

Somebody tell me how you resemble your parent or parents. Do you look like them physically? Do you have some of the same traits or mannerisms? Share some of the same beliefs or thoughts? How are you like them?

I was having lunch with my mom a few years ago. I don't remember where or what the occasion was that it was just her and me. But I guess I was looking around kind of weird and she asked me what I was looking for. So, I had to admit to her that almost everywhere I go, I look to see how I could rob the place. Now, hear me out. I have never robbed any place and I never will nor do I really want to. It's just a game I play, I guess. I look to see where the register is, where the exits are, how many people work there, do they have cameras, are they busy, would it be worth it – all that stuff goes through my mind. And I hate to admit that. The funny thing is, though, that my mother looked at me and said, *"Oh my word. Your father does the same thing!"*

I'm like my dad in some ways – most of them not so good. Like that. He got the great head of hair. I got this. He could tie any knot but a pine knot, make a mouse with a handkerchief, speak pig-Latin Spanish and preach the paint off the walls. Me? I'm looking to knock over the Whataburger. But, evidently, I get it from him. And I wish I was more like him. He was a great man and I loved him.

But even more than I want to be like my dad, I want to be like my Father. Give me some words that describe God the Father. He is loving, merciful, creative, forgiving, sovereign, just, and powerful and so much more and I want to look and act like Him more and more every day. I want people to see me from across the room and say, *"That guy is a Christian. I can tell."* I'm not there yet but that's what I want. And the one quality that God possesses the most that I want the most and that I want the most of in my life...is love.

It has been said that while God IS love, love doesn't define God but God defines love. It never says that God is power or God is creativity or God is mercy. But it does say that God IS love. It's a verse and a concept that we teach the youngest of our children - and we should – and yet it is not a concept that most adults can really grasp, much less strive to be. But it is one of the ways by which we know that we are true believers. If we look like our Father and act like our Father, especially when it comes to love, it is one of the tests that assure us we are born of the Father (as John says). It is one of the ways, one of the tests, that let us know that we truly are believers and followers of Jesus and we are going to Heaven when we die.

Grab your Bible and turn once again to the book of **1 John** where we can take another test to prove our salvation. And who are we proving it to? Nobody but ourselves. We can't prove it to anybody else nor can they prove their salvation to us but we can prove it to ourselves. The first test was the faith test. We are saved by grace and through faith. The next test, from last week, was the life test. Does our life reflect the Father in our good works? If not, that might raise a red flag for us. This week, in **1 John chapter 4**, we will see if our life can pass the love test. Do we love like the Father loves? I know. Those are big shoes to try to fill but we are commanded to love like God loves so let's see what that means and what it looks like.

I'm going to read **1 John 4:7-12**. John talks a lot about love in these three letters and he talked a lot about it in his Gospel. Here in 1 John, he has spent the last three chapters talking about it but sums it up here in this paragraph. Let's read it.

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

So, at the risk of this sounding like a cheesy 80's song title, I will ask the question, what is love? What is it? Is it a feeling? The dictionary says it is. The first definition of love in the dictionary is: an intense feeling of deep affection. What do you think about that? Well, I'm not going to say that Webster is wrong, necessarily, but I guess it depends on what kind of love we are talking about. Because I love my job, I love my country, I love my spouse, I love peanut butter. It's all different kinds of love but the kind of love that God calls us to have – the kind of love that proves we are true believers – is agape (uh-gop-a) love. And agape love is not a feeling. It is a choice. I don't agape love peanut butter. I agape make the choice to love people.

That's the kind of love that John is writing about here. Unlike emotional, physical or friendship love, agape love is the love of self-sacrificing service. It is the love granted to someone who needs to be loved. (MacArthur, 1-3 John, p. 165) And it is the hardest of all the different kinds of love and because it is difficult, you have to decide you are going to do it. You don't "fall in" this kind of love. It doesn't always feel good. It's not always rewarded and it is rarely deserved.

On May 2, 1962, a dramatic advertisement appeared in the San Francisco Examiner: "I don't want my husband to die in the gas chamber for a crime he did not commit. I will therefore

offer my services for 10 years as a cook, maid, or housekeeper to any leading attorney who will defend him and bring about his vindication." From the Book of Lists #2, p. 157.

It's my understanding that an attorney did take the case and prove the man's innocence but the love that woman showed for her husband is pretty remarkable. It wasn't a warm, fuzzy feeling that made her place that ad and offer to work for ten years to get her husband back. She hadn't just fallen in love with him. She had made the choice to love him and that required her to sacrifice her own good and her own pleasure.

So, how do we do it? How do we love like that? How do we even know when we are doing it or when somebody is loving us that way? Well, John tells us in **verse 7** and then gives us the example of it in **verse 9**. Verse 7 says that kind of love comes from God. It is a gift of God.

Have you noticed that the other two tests we took – the life test and the faith test – are impossible tests? In my own power, I don't have enough faith to believe that Jesus paid my sin debt by dying on the cross. I can't do it. I also don't have the ability to do the kind of good works that God wants me to do. Can't do that either. And I sure can't love people in a self-sacrificing way like God expects. Not in my power.

But, thank you, Lord, that none of this happens in my power. And that is the point with all these tests. None of it is in your power. The proof that you are a believer is that in God's power, you can have faith. In God's power, you can do good deeds. And in God's power, you can make the choice to love even unlovely people. You can do it. But you have to choose to.

But before we choose to, we have to know what we are choosing to do and John tells us that in **verse 9**. Look at it again. Hey John, give us an example of what agape love looks like so we'll know. John says, *"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him."*

Those of you that have kids, I know you may want to strangle them sometimes but how many of you would rather die than see your child get hurt? Of course you would. You might want to shoot them yourself but if somebody else is shooting at them, you'll dive in front of the bullet. I know that "mama bear" mindset that comes out when you think your child might be hurt by something or someone.

So, here's the rules of the game. And the rules are set by God the Father. Whenever somebody sins, something has to die. Sin is so serious and so harmful that the only way to "balance the books" and make things right again is for something to die. So, all through the Old Testament the people would sacrifice animals to cover over their sin in the sight of God. And God said that was fine. That will do.

But before the creation of mankind and the whole universe, God the Father said that at the right time, He would send His one and only Son, Jesus, to die for the sins of the world. The perfect Father loved the perfect Son with agape love and yet willingly sent Him to the cross to die for you because He loved you – imperfect you – with agape love. He made the choice to love you that much. That is what agape love looks like. **Romans 5:8** says that God demonstrated His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Agape love comes from God and it is illustrated by God and we will see in the next few verses that it is commanded by God. Look at **verse 11**. *“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”* So, let’s talk about this command. Guys, has your wife ever said to you as you were getting dressed up for something, *“You ought to wear that other shirt with those pants”* or something like that? You know what I mean. Let’s assume your wife has good taste. And let’s assume you have a typical guy’s taste. Do you change your shirt? Sure you do. And it’s probably not that hard of a decision to make. You know she’s right. You know you and her both will look better if you do.

It's similar to when God gives us this command to love other people. Is He right? Of course He is. And it’s not that hard of a decision to make most of the time. You know you and He will both look better if you do. And He’s going to give you the power to do it.

Have you ever thought about what Jesus said in **Matthew 11**? *“My yoke is easy and my burden is light.”* His commands aren’t hard because He gives you the power to do them. And He will give you the power to love people – even the unlovely ones – when you are a true believer.

I heard the story of a dad who was taking his two kids to the mall. The little girl was 8 and the boy was 5. When they got there, they saw that there was a petting zoo outside. It was there the last time they went and the price was just a dollar each so the dad gave them each a dollar and went inside. The kids were both thrilled. He looked around the store for just a minute and then looked out the front door to check on the kids and the little girl was standing outside the fence. Dad was wondering what was wrong of course. Was she hurt? What happened?

So, he walked out there and he can see that nothing is wrong. In fact, the little girl is laughing at her little brother trying to pet a llama or something so he asked what happened. She said that the price had gone up to two dollars each **so she gave her brother her dollar**. Self-sacrificing love. That is what we are called to do and commanded to do and empowered to do.

But don’t you wish it was always as easy as just giving a kid a dollar? Don’t you wish it was always showing love to someone who was easy to love? John, where is the exception that says if somebody is mean to us, we don’t have to love them? Where is the exception that says if

somebody makes the choice to hurt us then we don't have to make the choice to love them? Where is it, John?

I think John would answer that by repeating **verse 11**. Since God so loved us, we ought to love one another. There is no exception. And that would be impossible to do...if we had to do it in our own power. But the same power that rose Jesus from the grave lives in us to enable us to love the unlovely and if you can't see that in your own life – and see it growing more and more in your life the more you get close to God – then that ought to send up a red flag that maybe there is something wrong with your relationship with God. Or maybe that relationship doesn't even really exist like you thought it did.

It's not about trying harder. It's not about buckling down and really giving it the ol' college try. It's about saying, *“Lord, I can't do this. I can't love this person. Will you do it through me? Will you do it? Because I can't. Please God, do it for your glory.”* And then just stand back and watch as God does it. He does it through you. And He gets the glory and you get the benefits. That's just how God works.

Do you see that happening more and more in your life? Let's bow our heads and close our eyes and I want you to really think about your life. Can you pass this love test? It's an impossible test and you can only pass it with God's help but he only helps people do that who truly believe. Has there ever been a time in your life when you have in faith asked God to forgive you of all your sins, allowed Him to come into your life and change you and make you more like Him? All you have to do is believe. If you haven't, do it right now as the music plays.