

6/18/26 1 Jn. 4:19-5:12, That Which Only God Can Do

John is continuing to drive home his point about what God's love is, how it differs from human love, and what it implies to know that by the indwelling Spirit, God's unique love is being formed in us. He's going to contrast human and divine love again, but this time using the reality of actions (not emotion) because actions are a give-away when it comes to exposing the type of love being expressed by those who claim to "love God" and are abiding in Him.

Since the principles we'll look at are familiar, I'm running with this author's explanation of what Peter wrote in 2nd Pet.

Peter's sentiment in 2 Peter 1:12-13, reflects the Apostle's commitment to *reinforcing* the truth for believers. He finds it necessary to "stir up" Christians through consistent reminders, even if they are already established in the present truth, to ensure they remain grounded.

So, we'll begin with 1 Jn. 4:19-21;

We love Him because He first loved us. If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

As we saw in our last study, it's not difficult to understand what John wrote. The problem comes in when we try to apply this to what we see happening around us; and of course, in many cases, what we see happening *in* us.

John starts with a quick reminder of the source of any love we have that is real. "We love Him because He first loved us." And of course, besides the 33-year outshining of that love in the life of Jesus, the ultimate demonstration and evidence of God's love is the Cross. The more we understand of why that event took place and what it meant in great scheme of things, the more we find our love for God deepening and expanding.

When the cross becomes little more than something on a chain around our necks or a plaque on the wall behind a pulpit, it can easily, at least subconsciously, be relegated to something infinitely smaller than what it was meant to accomplish and show us of God Himself.

The reality and measure of our love for Him will be in direct proportion to our understanding of His love for us. And as Paul wrote in Rom. 5:6-8, that understanding will also be significantly affected by how clearly we see the difference between the love expressed on the Cross and the highest of loves expressed by humanity. Here's the Roman's passage;

For when we were still without any merit, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

And in another place, instead of "sinners", Paul uses the word "enemies".

Point being, that God's love is immeasurably higher than anything we can imagine, let alone produce. His ways and thoughts are not our ways and thoughts.

But now that we are in Christ and He is being formed in us, we can begin to share in the love that is developing within us. In the context of John's letters, this is only possible for those who are truly 'abiding in Christ' rather than in themselves, or in a man-made Christian religion. It is a spiritual reality based on a spiritual union and relationship between a child of God and their Father.

Once John makes that clear, he then begins, once again, to challenge the claims of those who say they not only understand all this, but are shining examples of it.

(vs. 20) If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar.

I know that what I'm going to say now might be a bit controversial, but I can't think of another way to put it that makes a solid application to our generation. I think if we were living in a different generation, this wouldn't be that controversial, but here we are. The most often phrase I hear when I listen to Christians speaking of other Christians, regardless of whether what they say is meant to be

complementary or critical, they almost always add: “He (or she) loves God”. Or, if on the critical side, they’ll say, “at least he or she loves God.”

John doesn’t take that approach at all. He knows that not all who claim to love God actually love Him, even if *they* believe they do. And remember the context of this letter; it’s a challenge to expose and reject imitation and falsehood. Whether John’s point in any given passage is to challenge the reality of ‘abiding in Christ’ or “loving one’s brother”, he doesn’t assume all believers are operating at the same level in any of these things.

But its even more than that, because flowing throughout John’s letters (as well as Paul’s and Peter’s) is the deliberate, almost desperate, desire to expose the hypocrisy of the claims made by Christians John says are aligning with “many antichrists”. It’s a little more serious to John than simply being a little off on our claim of abiding or of loving.

It’s a matter of growth and conformity to Christ versus deception and spiritual stagnation.

To add substance to this, Jesus takes John’s approach (or, I guess we should say, John takes Jesus’s approach)

(John 14:21, 24) He who has My commandments and keeps them, *this* is the one who loves Me . . . He who does not love Me does not keep My words.

We know from 1 Jn. 1:8 & 10 that perfection is not the issue, either in love or obedience. “There is none that sinneth not”.

But you’ll notice that in both the Lord’s and John’s approach to challenging the claims of others, they don’t focus on emotion or intentions, but on actions. We can’t say we love God if we treat our brothers and sisters badly; and we can’t say we love the Lord, if we don’t pursue understanding His purpose for us and commit to it.

We’ll never be perfect in this life, but once they get to know someone, then spiritual discernment can usually tell whether that person is living with a true

desire to learn all they can about the Lord and to obey what they discover is His will for them and for the Church.

Let's set those verses in 1 Jn. and the gospel of John side-by-side;

If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar.

He who has My commandments and keeps them, *this* is the one who loves Me . . .

So, the next time you're tempted to say; "so & so loves the Lord", when you've seen them, *in action*, either treating a fellow Christian in an unloving way or closing down when they are exhorted to gain an increased knowledge of our Lord's purpose for His people and follow Christ to spiritual maturity; if you say that person "loves the Lord" you don't realize the dangers that come from minimizing the reason Christ and John made those distinctions. It's not just word-play; and they aren't being judgmental; there is something spiritually vital behind the statements they made that we should never ignore.

We've touched on part of this before, but we need to keep in mind what the word "hate" refers to in the context of 1 Jn. 4:20; 'If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar"

Just like agape love, the word "hate" is not inferring something emotional. We can't read minds; the only way we can know what another person is thinking is by their actions; their words can be deceiving; but actions will eventually expose them.

When we studied John's use of "hate" in 1 Jn. 2, this is what came out in that study;

In the original, words like "hate" and "love" (depending on context) are not referring to emotion, but to action.

As one example, Jesus didn't emotionally love the Pharisees; He called them vipers, deceivers, hypocrites, children of the devil, etc. Those aren't words of affection. But He died for them; He genuinely desired that every one of them would believe in Him, and some (like Saul of Tarsus and Nicodemus)

did eventually believe. And by our actions, we can love people we may never emotionally be friends with.

It's the way we treat people that determines obedience to what John is writing about; not how we "feel" about them. Emotions are nearly impossible to control; actions are less impossible to control.

Just to give you an example of contextual interpretation, in Matt. 5:44 our Lord gives an action-based definition of "love" and "hate";

Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.

To "love" your enemies would be to "bless them" in some way; to be hated would be to be "despitefully used" or to be "persecuted". "Blessed", "despitefully used" and "persecuted" are all action words, not feeling words.

It's always possible that someone hating us also detests us but in the context of what John is communicating in 1 Jn., he's giving us details we can see with our own eyes- overt "actions", that reveal whether or not genuine love is characteristic of the person *claiming* to be loving.

We all have to experience our emotions pound on us like waves, but we are encouraged not to get self-condemning and guilt-ridden just because if we had a gun, we'd want to shoot the guy that cut us off in traffic. It's what we do when we settle down that matters the most; we re-holster, take a deep breath, and drive on.

Globally, there is a rapid increase in the division between those who are moving steadily into being a part of God's completion of His purpose in the Church and those who are being increasingly absorbed into the current, popular imitation of that purpose.

Jesus had two primary missions to accomplish at His first coming. One was to be the sinless offering for the sins of the World – to accomplish our redemption. The other was to demonstrate exactly what God had in mind when He said, "Let us make man in our image" (Gen. 1:26-27). In this role, our Lord was to show us what a perfect Son of Man is.

In order to fulfill this second mission, the Son of God set aside His divine resources and for 33 years He lived as fully human to demonstrate what, in God's mind, a human is meant to be. During the time of His life here, Christ lived in full dependency on His Father, so much so, that in John 14 our Lord said;

He who has seen Me has seen the Father . . . The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.

And John reinforces this in 1 Jn. 2:6; "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked."

The final falling away of the Church, in principle, is very simple. Instead of seeing the "life of Jesus" Himself expressed through us, what we see in contemporary Christianity are sincere and often extremely committed Christians using all their ingenuity, compassion and energy to do what they believe the Bible tells us to do.

So, what the world sees is not "the life of Jesus"; it sees the lives of committed Christians *imitating* Jesus to the best of their ability. This is why the Church is ". . . ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the Truth", because the "Truth" is a Person, not simply a well-developed doctrinal statement fleshed out in the self-generated moral and religious obedience of Christians.

Here's an insight from a last century theologian I shared a few months ago – he was aware of the development of this coming apostasy. He saw the writing on the wall;

Let me state the cause of my burden. It is this; Jesus Christ has today almost no authority at all among the groups that call themselves by His Name. I refer to Protestant churches generally, and I include those that protest the loudest that they are in spiritual descent from our Lord and His apostles, namely the Evangelicals. Board meetings are habitually opened with a formal prayer; after that the Head of the church is respectfully silent while the real rulers take over.

If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95 percent of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference. If the Holy Spirit

had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, 95 percent of what they did would stop, and *everybody* would know the difference. (A.W. Tozer)

And of course, Rev. 3:17 give us the bottom-line of all of it “. . . You don't realize that you are blind.”

The Church is meant to be the dwelling place of Christ and is to manifest Him to the world; the invisible made visible through His body – but instead, it's become a global 'what would Jesus do' organization of Christians doing their best to live a life only Christ can live. The result, of course, is hundreds of denominations and viewpoints of what matters most, instead of the purity and unity of a corporately expressed vision of like-minded disciples of Christ living by the indwelling guidance of the Lord.

For the most part, these are 'intentionally removed' principles, because the enemy knows that the best most believers will accomplish will be a “form of godliness” (2 Tim. 3:5), not an expression of Christ Himself. That's something only Christ can do because it's His life that needs to be seen, not our best rendition of that life.

The greatest need of our time in terms of the message given to God's children is similar to the work accomplished by the Old Testament prophets – to expose what has been lost and to instruct in a way that brings a full recovery.

In our study of 1 Jn. we are seeing, in the principle of abiding, *how* the Christ-life is formed and expressed. If we continue to pray that the Lord will make all of this very personal for us, that which is real will slowly become clear, and that which is not will also become clear.

This is John's hope. He wants us to see the simplicity of “Not I, but Christ” and avoid accepting the massive, impressive, system of organized Christendom that embraces us, distracts us, entertains us and robs us of the purity of simple abiding in the One Who loves us and indwells us – the Father and child relationship that we saw so beautifully in Jesus's relationship with *His* Father in the Gospels.

Ok, that's the end of my 'tangent'; I just see so much happening in the Church that's other than what happened in the beginning, I don't want any of us to be

unnecessarily confused or especially to “lose our first love”; our primal, personal love for Christ.

The New Testament epistles centered on doctrine as much as on application; the apostles knew the value of theology as being that which God uses to bring spiritual revelation, vision and clarity to us.

Ok,- back to 1 Jn.

(1 Jn. 5:1-3) Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot, also loves him who is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Compare what John says in 5:1 w/ the last vs. of chapter 4 (vs. 21);

(5:1, last part) “. . . everyone who loves Him who begot (us) also loves him who is begotten of Him.

(Now, this is 4:21) “. . . this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

It would be an understatement to say that John has a consistent “emphasis” in these chapters. On the surface, we could say that that emphasis is loving God and one another – the two greatest commandments being fleshed out in the new humanity. But we also know the *motive* of John’s letter which we saw in 1 Jn. 2:26, “I write these things to you concerning who are trying to deceive you.”

So, somehow, John’s recurring emphasis on making sure we understand what agape is, both by definition and expression, is tied into our protection from being deceived. In the Bible, repetition happens when the subject is extremely important.

And remember, as this author put it,

Whether or not a believer exhibits an admirable life, he should still be an object of love by his fellow Christians. This love does not spring from something lovable in the person himself, but from his mutual relationship in the family of God since everyone who loves the Father loves His Father's child as well. Moreover, love for God's children is not mere sentiment or verbal expression, but is inseparable from loving God and obeying His commands.

That helped me see the connection. When love is understood and expressed; when we are able to recognize the real vs. the imitation in these areas of loving the brethren and in knowing and recognizing true obedience to God, we are likely to see through the false claims of those who say they love but don't, and who say they are obedient but aren't.

That might seem simple on the surface – identifying false vs. true love and obedience, but when we know that many Christians are loving and obeying in the flesh (using their soul and expressing Philéo, not Agape) and that many anti-Christ's are actually emissaries of Satan “disguised as ministers of righteousness”, it's not so simple.

It takes significant discernment and what John is doing is keeping our focus, first on our own abiding and growth to gain that discernment, and focused on actions over claims. John knows how we can be safe and what puts us in danger, so he repetitiously defines both abiding and the divine love that comes only from divine nature, so we will know where to look and not be distracted by what may appear to be “of Christ”, but isn't.

We can help ensure our safety if we focus on abiding, growing and making decisions based on observable actions over claims and emotions.

Now, in vs's 4 & 5 John connects this to what he wrote earlier;

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

First, like everything we study, we can't separate this from its context and assume that because we're seeing the word "overcome" or "overcomer" that John is talking about the same thing Paul was talking about when he used that word, or what John was referring to in Revelation chapters 2 & 3 when he talked about the overcomers in the 7 churches.

The context in 1 Jn. is overcoming deception by avoiding the false beliefs of who Jesus is that the Gnostics and the Antinomians were propagating at that time in history.

For our study in 1 Jn. 5, it's important to know that to be an 'overcomer' in the sense John means in this context, is to be able, by the power and grace that comes to us who are born again, to be victorious over all the lies of the world system (which we spent a lot of time defining).

John says that it's "our faith" in believing that "Jesus is the Son of God" that successfully closes down the enemy's deceptions about who the true Christ is. Neither the Gnostics nor the Antinomians John was defending against believed what was contained the true meaning of Christ being the Son of God. They redefined "son"; they redefined the relationship between Christ and the Father; they redefined who Christians are as "sons" plural of God, and more.

In our introduction to 1 John, we studied those first century false systems of doctrine. The reason we took the time to do that was partly because we needed to know what John was up against and what it was that was driving him to write his letter, but also because I wanted us to know that in our generation, 2000 years later, several new doctrinal aberrations have been offered to the Church that are much more deceptive, subtle, powerful, appealing and well-developed than anything that was happening in the 1st. century. "Re-definitions" are happening now too- they're just harder to see. And even more so, when "milk" is all you have to work with in developing your own spiritual discernment.

Jesus's warning in Matt. 24 about the possibility of the elect being deceived, and Paul's warnings in 1st and 2nd Timothy, were in the context of warning about many extremely sophisticated deceptions flooding the nations and the Church at the end

of the Age, deceptions that very few would have the spiritual discernment to see through.

But one thing that remains true then and now is that our means of protection, of being “overcomers” in *this* sense, regardless of what *we* are up against, is still a protection based on in-depth study of God’s Word and prayer, with the added qualifier that we absolutely have to be open to what the Lord shows us, even if it causes a major course correction in our lives. I only add that because there are thousands of theologically academic scholars in our 21st. century pulpits that are as far removed from understanding what the Church really is as those drawn into Gnosticism was the 1st. century.

Deception is a spiritual issue, not an academic issue. And the knowledge of God’s Word is not dependent on the brain nearly as much as on the condition of the heart, of relationship and especially teachability.

(John 5:39-40) You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.

We’ll have to wrap up soon, so let’s move to 1 Jn. 5:6-8 and look at a passage that has confused commentators for centuries.

Interestingly, there are only 4 or 5 very late Greek manuscripts that contain the last part of vs. 7 and the first part of vs. 8. Here’s the wording that is left out of the most ancient manuscripts;

“. . . in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth . . . “

I’ve read arguments on why this passage should or shouldn’t be considered part of the Bible – the arguments usually center around the issue of reliability regarding the more recent manuscripts. But here’s my take; and no one has to agree with me to go to heaven.

I believe strongly in these two things about God – He is faithful and He is sovereign. His sovereignty means that He won’t let any created thing (man or angel) put

something in the Bible He doesn't want there. And His faithfulness means that He will make absolutely sure we have exactly what we need to reach spiritual maturity and glorify Him in this life.

So, for now, I'm running with these verses being there, but I just wanted you to know that there is a lot of controversy around their interpretation.

Ok, here's the full passage; vs's 6-8;

This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.

In the first verse, “water” refers to Jesus' baptism (which was His commission to enter into the ministry and purpose of His calling and was substantiated by the voice from heaven saying “This is My beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased – Matt. 3:17); and the blood would be the evidence of that purpose accomplished. As our Lord said on the Cross, “It is finished!”

And if we go a little deeper historically, and again stay with John's purpose and context in this epistle, which was to expose and defend against false teaching, I found this in a Biblical encyclopedia reference that shows the doctrinal interpretations of some of the 'antichrist' false teachers active in John's generation;

John's insistence that He did not come by water only, but by water and blood, suggests that he was refuting a false notion of the type held by Cerinthus who taught that the divine Christ descended on the man Jesus at His baptism and then left Him before His crucifixion. He denied the one Person, Jesus Christ, came by both water and blood. Cerinthus was not alone in such views at that time, which John regarded as utterly false and contrary to the true testimony of the Holy Spirit. There are three that are in agreement with this truth; the Spirit, the water and the blood.

All of this is basically saying that the Holy Spirit's revelation of Christ, both as to His Person and His work, is both true and is substantiated by actual historical events which the Son of God participated in.

As we saw last week, all of the deception, throughout John's generation as well as the entire Church Age, is focused primarily on false teaching about either the Person of Christ or of why He came – or both.

In vs's 9-12, John doubles down on the *reasonableness* of believing these things by reminding his readers, especially his Jewish readers, of what they should already know from passages like Deut. 19:15;

One witness shall not prevail . . . but only on the testimony of two or three witnesses shall a charge be established.

Here's *John's* reasoning (I'm reading from the Amplified version)

If we accept [as we do] the testimony of men [if we are willing to take human authority], the testimony of God is greater (of stronger authority), for this is the testimony of God, even the witness which He has borne regarding His Son.

This is just another example of why the so-called 'confusing' or 'controversial' verses in 1 Jn. 5 are *not* confusing, but make total sense, if we make sure we are staying within the historical setting and purpose of John's letter.

The setting is the influx of false teaching and the purpose is exposing and defending against it. As long as that's the grid we're looking through, John's wording of things is much easier to understand.

I won't have time to finish chapter 5 tonight, so I want to close with something to think about that might be helpful. I think it's remarkable that John's letters, as well as Peter's letters and Paul's later letters, were all focused on trying to restore a lost understanding of what Christianity is. It's almost like they knew that what they were experiencing in having to battle massive re-definitions of both Christ and the Christian life would characterize the main spiritual battleground of every generation in the Church Age.

As dangerous as immorality and compromise with the world system are, what has become the *most* effective way to divide the Church into hundreds if not thousands of competing denominations thereby robbing the Church of its spiritual power, is false doctrine. So, to close, I'll hit this from one other angle I came across;

Christianity has become a tremendous buildup of things which were not existent at the beginning. The Christianity which we know today is a very complicated thing. The hands of men have come upon the things of God, and men have tried to build this great thing according to their own judgment. And so, we have all the confusion, divisions, and complications. It is really hard going in Christianity. Christianity has become its own great hindrance.

You will go about this country and you will see these great religious buildings with a cross at the top. And when people enter those buildings, they look very reverent. And they think that this is a sacred building. If you interfere with anything there, it is called sacrilege. To God that is all nonsense. It does not mean anything at all. The only thing that matters to God is not the wonderful building and all the wonderful things inside the building, and not even the decorative cross on the top. The one thing that matters to God is whether He is there. Is God Himself present in this place?

But what about us? We hear Christians speaking about coming into the house of God. Perhaps they say when they are going to this meeting place, "I am going to the house of God." And when they pray, they say, "We are very glad to be at Church this morning". What makes *any* place the house of God? What makes this place sacred? If it is sacred at all, what makes it sacred? It is not the building; this is not a sacred building. It is not even the congregation gathered here. The only thing that makes it sacred is that the Lord is present. The Lord is not interested in our buildings or in our numbers; He is only concerned that He may find a place for Himself where He may be present. I wonder where the tabernacle in the wilderness is now? I expect it is buried somewhere deep under the earth. I wonder where the great temple of Solomon is now?! I think you would be wasting your time trying to find it.

You see, God had buried those things.... Trust me, everything that is not of Christ is going to be dissolved. Make no mistake. This whole structure of Christianity is going to be tested according to Christ. Christianity is just going to be tested as to how much was the work of the Holy Spirit of God according to Christ and how much was us trying to do what only God can do.

Ok, also keep in mind what John told us about loving our brothers and sisters. If you're in a 'contemporary church' and you know there's problems, we are there to love those around us, and build relationships; and if there's an opening because mutual trust is happening through those relationships, maybe we can help.

We aren't there to judge, or slip in inuendo's or anything that can unnecessarily sabotage the possibility of a relationship which *could* lead to a valuable conversation. The key is patience, compassion, and mostly silence; (Jas. 1:19) "Be swift to listen, but slow to speak."

I mentioned an old-school cliché in one of our previous studies, – "People don't care how much we know, until they know how much we care", and that takes time. Our first order of business isn't to win arguments; it's to provide a perfect setting for an open door.

God doesn't need our help; He will make it obvious when, and if, He wants to use us. And the *when* is just as important as the *if*.