

Reading: 1 John 4:7-21

Theme: God is Love.

Here at v7 we come to a further repetition of the series of 3 tests and for the 3rd time we will start to look at each one. It doesn't mean that John has run out of ideas, far from it, for he deals with matters from new angles, reaches new depths and also heights as he does so! Some commentators suggest John is now emphasising what he has already written. There's no fresh or no new doctrine from here on, but he re-emphasises and draws out the implications of fellowship and sonship which he has laid down earlier. The 3 tests are set before us again, then John's concluding remarks (5:13-21):

1. The social test of loving other believers is shown in detail in 4:7-5:1.

2. The obedience test of keeping God's commandments is seen in 5:2-4.

3. The doctrinal test is shown in 5:5-12.

In 4:7-5:1 we are again considering the subject of love. Remember this is not old man John simply repeating himself in his dotage, but it is the Holy Spirit clearly presenting this again as important and, in this instant, with far greater force and insight. One writer sadly wrote "*John singeth his old song again.*" This is not to be thought of in a sad, repetitious way, but to be viewed in a way that opens up this matter further and gives us much to learn, apply and work out in our lives. This section is most searching, probing and even disturbing to our

indifference and apathy. It must surely search, probe and disturb us if we do not harden our hearts or stop our ears.

John has already shown us that love for other believers is a proof of fellowship with God (2:7-11) and it is also a proof of sonship (3:10-14) we saw in the 1st that love for other believers is a matter of light or darkness and in the 2nd it is a matter of life or death. As we go on in 4:7-5:1 we get down to the very foundation of the matter, for we will see that love is a valid test for our fellowship with God and sonship of God, because “God is love”. I want us to look at 3 things in v7 & 8, but only the 1st today:

1. The Essential Nature of God. (v8b)

The last 3 words of v8 form one of the most profound and glorious statements of the Bible “*God is love*”. For so many people today, it is one of the hardest statements to believe as they see so much hurt, pain, suffering and evil in the world; they see broken and ruined lives; they seem man’s inhumanity to man, to nature, to animals and this statement “*God is love*” seems far-fetched! Others go to the other extreme and question if God can really be bothered with this world - it is just one of billions of planets, with insignificant people on it who are just flashes, blips in the onward surge of time. They wonder would an all-powerful, infinite, supreme Being be bothered to be interested in or loving to such guilty, dirty creatures floating on a ball in space.

John says nothing concerning these questions and sentiments. In fact, John does not say that God is loving, but something more radical and fundamental “*God is love*”! Recognise the God the Bible proclaims is Almighty, all knowing, is the One and only God and is supreme over all Creation, but He is the personal Creator, yet He is not so great that He cannot be bothered with this world i.e. mankind, but He is so great that He is bothered with us personally and individually. John says far more than that. He is not writing of something God owns or does, but John is directing us to the very essence of God’s Being. John does not say that God loves us or is loving - true as that is, but that **He is** love. God’s very nature is love - said again in v16.

“*God is love*” is the 3rd great revelation of God’s nature John writes for us, with the other two in John 4:24 “*God is spirit*” and 1 John 1:5 “*God is light*”. None of these are a complete revelation of God on their own or together and all need to be considered in relation to each other, not in splendid isolation.

God is spirit: this is talking about His essence. He is not flesh and blood by nature. The Westminster Shorter Catechism asks “*Q4: What is God? A4: God is a Spirit - infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.*” It then adds note of explanation “*He has no body as we have, He is not limited by any want of power, affected by time,*

subject to change; He is wise, holy, just, good and true. This is our God - the greatest of all beings and the best.”

Yes, God the Son took a body to Himself and all the fullness of the godhead dwelt in him bodily (Colossians 2:9) and our Saviour has that glorified humanity in heaven and when we see Him we will be like Him in glory and one day have glorious resurrection bodies.

God is light: refers to His holy nature - as light is a picture in the Bible of holiness. God cannot sin because He is absolutely and completely holy and pure. Then this statement here in v8 -

God is love: we are not to confuse the world's view of love with God's love, especially not with the essential nature of God and it is technically not right to say "love = God". Much of so-called "love" in modern society bears no resemblance to the holy love of God, nor His essence as love. The love of God is infinite, is unmeasurable, is spiritual as opposed to carnal, it is pure holy love. An expression of that love is spoken of in 1 Corinthians 13.

This God is love. This holy, spirit being has as an essential part of His being "love". Have we ever wondered how is this in place? I know it sounds stupid question, but I hope you will see what I'm getting at in a little while. "*God is love*" but at one time there was only God. How could a solitary Being love? Yet His very essence is love.

Theologians and scholars point out that because God is love there has to be a plurality of persons in the being of God. In the Bible we are taught there is one God and yet we perceive, see He is the triune God - 3 persons in the godhead. We cannot explain this, we cannot understand it fully, but God is presented as the person of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They're not in splendid isolation from each other, but so enveloped, submerged, merged, united with each other that they are one God and yet distinctly 3 persons. We should recognise that at the heart of the being of God is a dynamic inter-personal relationship of love that is fundamental to God's being.

Love flows between the 3 divine persons in a constant interaction, so that every activity expresses the love which is God's divine nature. This is not just a static description, but a living, active and dynamic thing. The love of God is the delight and the pleasure of His nature outworked in love to the fellow members of the godhead.

Augustine and others deduced the doctrine of the Trinity in this statement "*God is love*" - that God being able to love indicates a plurality. The truth that God loves - within His own being or us, is because His nature is love. God's love (agape) is not earned, not deserved, not worked up, but proceeds out of the very essential nature of God - "*God is love*". From the very nature of God as holy love, springs the attribute of His goodness and from that His

mercy, His care of all creation, His love to those who do not deserve it.

As I was preparing, it struck me of the awesomeness of this essential nature of God which the Father, Son and Holy Spirit delights in and have known eternally. Even when God the Son became flesh and dwelt amongst us, His divine nature would continue to know that enfolding, engulfing and delighting love - until there on the cross it ceases to be delighted in or felt in all its experienced fullness, for it ceased completely to be felt. No longer was the Father's and the Holy Spirit's love felt, experienced and delighted in by the Son. No longer the felt delights in or of His fellow members of the godhead, now the horror of the holy anger, wrath and punishment of God the Judge smashes into Him as He is made sin, my sin, your sin as He took all we deserve in our place. Why did this occur? We catch a glimpse of the answer in v9 & 10.

The Father and the Holy Spirit still loved the Son, with an intensity of love and pride we cannot understand, as mysteriously the Father's love reaches its height at the very highest point of His wrath being outpoured on His Darling Son – because He was going the way of the Father. The Son may have been forsaken on the cross, not aware of the felt love of His Fellows in the godhead, but He was still loved with the love of the Father and the Holy Spirit - love we cannot even begin to imagine or explain. It is to this foundational truth that John draws our attention

as he exhorts, encourages us as believers to love one another.

John has the mind and heart of a mystic, a poet. He is not logical like Paul - start and this means... therefore do... As we have seen John thinks in a circular way - he starts on a practical point and then philosophises about it in a Christian way and then often ends up at a glorious statement of doctrine. I suppose John ends where Paul would have started! I have tried to take a Pauline approach by beginning at John's conclusion to see the great fundamental and foundational truth that John brings us to - "*God is love*".

Everything God has done, does and will do is affected, controlled, dominated by His nature as love - holy love, just love, pure love and all-wise love. We may question that and ask "*What about this or that...?*" But God's wisdom will not let Him make mistakes, His power means He is in control of all things, His holiness does not let him do anything wrong and all of God's actions are controlled by His essential nature being love. That we disagree with, can't see this, is a sign of our limited capacities and understanding and not a failure on God's part to be true to His essential nature, this foundational, fundamental truth that God is love in His essential being and nature.

John shows in v7 & 8 that the love we as Christians are to show to one another is to be an out showing, an

outworking of that which springs from the very love nature of God. In fact, John will show us such in:

2. The Evidence of Our New Birth. (v7)

3. The Evidence of Knowing God. (v8a)

I know I failed to get through my planned 3 headings in my preparation, but I don't care! We've seen much of the essential nature of God and seen a glimpse of it being outworked. Have we come to see, feel and be ravished by the love of God to us personally in the Lord Jesus Christ? We may know of Him, may be able to quote verses, tell the account of His death, even that Jesus died for sinners to save them, but we may not know that love personally as ours. This evening God lovingly calls on us to believe, to know the love of God for us personally and it is *'better felt than telt'*!

If we are Christians, we can delight in such love and yet we are to be discontented by what we experience of it. If it is so great, so amazing, why settle for a little bit? My prayer for us all is Ephesians 3:17b-19 *"I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fulness of God."*