

Reading: 1 John 4:7-5:1

Theme: Important Evidences

We are turning our attention again to 4:7-8. Last week we noted the first of 3 headings to open up these verses – **1. The Essential Nature of God. (v8b)** – God is love. This is the foundational, bottom line reason given why we as believers in the Lord Jesus are to love one another - God is love. We noted that God is not only loving, but that the intrinsic, basic nature of God is love. We noted that this flags up, indicates that in God there is a plurality, for a single solitary supreme Being may have many things intrinsic to their being, but not love – for this indicates a relationship with others.

We briefly considered the wonder of this love relationship between the members of the Triune God and how it remained in place as God the Son took a real body and dwelt among us. We touched on the awesomeness, the horror of that love ceasing to be a felt by the Lord Jesus on the cross, as He was made sin and took our punishment in our place. The Father and the Holy Spirit never stopped loving the Son, but there He was isolated, cut off from all the delights of such love and He was the object of God's judgement for our sins' punishment. There God shows His love so we may know the love of God towards us who only deserve His punishment and wrath.

We can be so content in our Christian lives, be so self-justifying and feel we are fine, especially in this area of loving one another. John in v7-8 effectively comes and pokes us not only in the side, but it can feel like it is in the eye, not only once, but does it twice! Personally, I would resent that done as it would hurt, irritate and cause me to want to defend myself. We are to realise that John does not do this to make us put up our defences

or to hurt us, but to get us to seriously pay attention to what he says here and be ready for it to be a poke in the side, rather than in the eye, to stir us up, keep us awake to our Christian responsibility and duty. John is trying to jolt us from apathy, indifference and self-justifying ways. He tries to do this on 3 occasions in different ways in this section. Here in v7 he exhorts, encourages us to love one another; in v11 he gives is a statement of our duty and in v12 he uses a hypothesis, or scenario “*if we love one another, God abides, lives in us*”. Let’s see the next 2 pokes, I mean the next 2 points from v7-8:

2. The Evidence of New Birth. (v7)

John declares that love comes from God - because God’s essential nature is love and it follows that the love spoken of here (agape) is not to be confused with human love however great it is and certainly not lust or wrong desire, not even the love of friends, or parent and child. This love is a far more glorious greater love - it is a selfless, self-giving unconditional love that desires the real good of the one it loves and delights in.

The love we as Christians are exhorted to love one another with is the love that has its origin, its source in and from God. A literal translation in v7 is “*for the love is out from the God*”. John goes on to define this love in v9-10. This is the love which cannot be worked up, cannot be imitated, cannot truly be shown by anyone who is not a Christian. Sadly, some caricature Christianity in saying “*We are to be loving*”. While the Bible says Christians are to love one another, and to love those who are not Christians, to do them good especially in proclaiming the gospel freely and willingly to them, the Bible never says that

the gospel message is simply to be loving! Especially if they mean loving in a mushy, sentimental and gooey way.

In fact, we have to declare that outside of being a Christian, people cannot love with the love of God. I am not saying people are loveless or unloving; nor that people motivated by love do not do great, heroic and selfless deeds. Yet they cannot love with this love of God. Only those who have trusted the Lord Jesus as their Saviour are capable of this agape love and they, and they only, are the ones exhorted, told to show this love to fellow believers. This love is to be shown and demonstrated in action and not merely spoken of, preached on or theorised over. This is an evidence of our new birth, of our being born of God.

Let's pause a moment and consider these terms "*born of God*", "*new birth*". The Bible shows us that this needs to occur in a person's life else they are not a Christian. They may be very nice, even be very religious, have all sorts of religious and churchy rituals done to them, but none of these make a person a Christian. The Bible speaks of us naturally being separated from God, not belonging to Him, but to a real devil. Word pictures are used to show the truth that we are strangers to God and not His people; we are dead spiritually and can do nothing to be right with God or change our situation.

For anyone to know God, to love God, to be forgiven, needs a radical work that we cannot do, but thankfully God can and He offers freely in the gospel. The gospel tells us of God's way of salvation and how He calls to us in the word preached, or read or spoken to us. As the word of God is used, so He begins to work and people become aware of God, of the importance of the things of God, the Bible begins to make sense and they are

interested. It is God at work by His Holy Spirit - who works using means, often over a period of time, (*shorter or longer*). He, the Holy Spirit, gives them life, new life and as they have this new life they see, understand and believe in the Lord Jesus.

It is such a radical event that the Bible describes it as “*new birth*” or “*born of God*” or “*born again*”. It is interesting that the last term was 1st proclaimed to a very high ranking, good living and very religious Jew and it caused him confusion, for it removed all his self-improvement methods and left him to call on God alone. Becoming a Christian is not just a decision in a meeting, or signing a card, or saying a prayer, but it is radical work of God in our dead souls. Yes, it may show in our experience and we “decide” to follow Jesus, or it is crystallised in a meeting where we say a prayer, or sign a card, but those are not our being born of God, but may be a result of being born of God.

Our Christian forefathers would speak of calling on God, of God receiving us, of being converted, of repentance and new life, of a work of God in our souls - opening our minds, hearts and eyes to see our need a Saviour and realising we can do nothing else than go to Him for salvation. When this truly happens, we are born of God, have eternal life and spiritually have a new nature - a godlike nature which is worked out and demonstrated in our lives.

John says here that loving one another, as God loves, as Christ loves and commanded us to do so, is an evidence of our new birth. Some would go so far as to say it is the most thorough and basic test of whether we are true Christians or not. It is possible for us to have an intellectual acceptance of biblical truth and

doctrine; to hold orthodox views, be able to debate and defend them, even to be highly ethical and moral and do much good, but we may not necessarily be born of God!

To love our brothers and sisters in Christ is a fundamental test, a thorough test and evidence of our being born of God. Only those born of God can love like this. In fact, they do not have to work it up, or put it on as a show, but they will find that they love one another and they cannot help it! If the Divine nature is in us because of our being born of God, it will evidence itself, it will out and will manifest itself to a greater or lesser extent.

Here is the point John is driving at, the poke he gives us in the eye or ribs - if we do not love other believers, if we can nurture and hold on to resentment, anger, malice, bitterness etc. - then we are not to fool ourselves that we are born of God. Ouch! Isn't that unloving John? Not at all! It is not unloving at all - John is seriously, solemnly proclaiming a wake-up call so that such ungracious, unloving, cold and hard-hearted ones (*even with great knowledge, claims and experience*) will then wake up and see their need to call on God for mercy and salvation – which is for their eternal good and best.

A person born of God will feel love and concern for even those they naturally dislike or clash with, for those who irritate them and who may have hurt or upset them. There is a sense of compassion, a heartache for them, a sense of pity they are like that and they will pray for them and as, or if they have opportunity, they will do them good and certainly not rejoice in any ill or harm or trouble that comes to them. This again will be in place to a lesser or greater degree.

John pokes us all and says “*What of you?*” Let’s not wriggle away, but sit up and take notice of what he is saying and what the Lord is saying through him. John has given us quite a poke, but he will go on and do it again as we see that loving one another as believers is:

3. The Evidence of Spiritual Knowledge. (v8a)

John says that everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love, does not know God, because God is love. Here we have the divine logic - we are born of God and therefore claim to know God. We’ve come to know of Him, know Him, to continue in His nature and holiness and delighting that He is love. From Him we know His mercy, His forgiveness, care, grace as well as His goodness and love. Now then, if we claim to know Him, His love and His nature as love and we do not love one another - are our claims, however impressive, real or false?

John uses a word here that does not mean “*know about*”, or “*know of*” - for we can know of someone, know facts and figures about them and their lives, of their family, but that is not necessarily knowing them personally. The word John uses here is a word for knowing someone, that we have a personal knowledge and experience of. It involves knowing about and of, but it involves knowing personally. It is often used in the Bible as an idiom of expressing the act of lovemaking - the personal and intimate knowledge within a husband and wife relationship.

When we are born of God there is a personal relationship and intimacy that exists between us and God - we know Him in a personal relationship, one that is to grow, deepen and develop. One of the things we will know is that He is love and out of His

nature as love will be His communication of goodness to this creation and to us personally. Knowing what God is like and what He does, should affect our lives and we love one another as believers and sacrificially do good as we are able. If we do not love one another then we in effect say that we do not know God. Our actions and attitudes speak much louder than our profession with our lips!

There is to be a growth in our love for one another - as we grow in our knowledge of God, so our love should grow correspondingly. Paul writing in 1 Corinthians 13 on this love, speaks of being as a child and as mature. As we grow as a Christian, we are to know more and more that God is love and it is to be demonstrated most clearly in the lives of mature believers.

Sadly, it is not always the case - for a variety of reasons. Yet it should be that the more we see and know God is love, the more we want to know this and we should love other believers more. We are to be showing and proving that God is love by its practical outworking in our lives and the more this evidence is revealed in us, it is to encourage us more, as it shows we both know God and are born of Him.

Knowledge and love are to be intertwined - our knowledge of God and our love for God are to grow - as we love God we will learn more of Him, and yet as we learn of God so we will come to love Him more and both will work out in the love of God being shown by, recognised in and channelled through us.

To love as God commands mean we consciously seek to live as Christ would. In 1 Corinthians 13 we can put Christ's name and

life there. We are to increasingly imitate Him and consciously seek to put our name there by our love and actions - not as a show to gain attention, but genuinely from our innermost being. We are to love as He loved, to see others as He sees them and to have true compassion, pity, care and concern for their true good and benefit. We are to be mini Christ's as we are in our homes, in our work places, as we interact with our family and friends, or as we are out and about in society. Our aim is to evidence Christ in our lives, especially in the way that we love and care for people.

Our knowledge is not to puff us up and inflate us with pride, but it is to result in the practical outworking of showing the love of Christ in and through our lives. None of us will do this perfectly, but that is not to stop us knowing more of God in and through the Lord Jesus and showing the love of God for His glory.