

Reading: Song of Solomon 2:1-15 (NKJV)

Theme: Knowing and Showing God's Love.

In looking at 1 John 4:13ff I have been struck by the honours, privileges we have as believers from the **Evidences of God's love** to us. Here in the 4th evidence: Confidence in God's love (v16-19) we have noted 4 things so far: A. Experience of God's love (v16a); B. Living in God's love (v16b); C. Confidence through God's love (v17) - we can have boldness and comfort in the light of the Day of Judgement; last time we saw D. Fearless in God's love (v18) – His love calms and can remove our fear, cringing fear of the Day of Judgement, indeed Judgement. Under the same 4th evidence: Confidence in God's love, this evening we see **E. Response to God's love (v19)**. In the light of the love of God which we have experienced, are to live in, that gives us boldness, comfort and removes our cringing fear even of the awesome Day of Judgement, what then is our response to such love? Why do we respond?

In a sense v19 is a bridge as it links what has gone on with what is to come in 4:20-5:1. It is as if John comes to a conclusion in v19 and in the next 3 verses opens it out again by his circular reasoning. At this point, let's make a technical comment on v19. Some versions read "*We love Him because He first loved us*", while most versions leave out the word "Him". Scholars have compared many original manuscripts and the oldest manuscripts do not have the word "Him" in them. It seems to have been inserted at some point to try to give the verb "we love" an object. While I do not object to the insertion, for it is true, it is restrictive as I feel it includes **more** than us loving God - as I hope we'll see, but it certainly does include first and foremost loving Him.

As I was reading in preparation I found a wonderful comment by Matthew Henry about this verse where he says “*The Divine Love stamped love upon our souls.*” I’m going to split that phrase to take my 2 headings from:

1. The Divine Love.

John here says He, i.e. God, 1st loved us. Sounds so simple and clear, but this carries within it a staggering weight of awesome and precious truth. We, who are Christians, know that at one time we did not have a flicker of a heartbeat of love for God. If you are not a Christian that is your state now. Yes, you may be sympathetic, say you are seeking or you would like to know God’s love and even love Him yourself, but there is no love for God present in you. Naturally this is the state and condition of us all and we would remain in that state except for this enormous truth that God 1st loved us. Why ever did God 1st love us? There is nothing at all in us to deserve, earn or merit His love. It was never dependent on us at all - us doing any good, being moral, religious or even a churchgoer. It is not dependent upon us coming to see our need and trust the Lord Jesus as our Saviour. The love of God is independent, is not conditional on anything or any response foreknown and foreseen in us by God. The love of God is before any repentance on our part, before any longings after God, any desires or hopes for God, any thoughts of being right with God. We are to recognise and mark it well that the love of God for the likes of us took no reason, derived no origin from us, anything in us, anything we would say, feel, think, respond to or do.

This love comes from the Being, Person and Character of God Himself. It is a self-generating love that comes out from His own nature as love - “*God is love*”. Out of the perfect Being

and nature of God comes this love to hopeless and helpless sinners like us. That is why it is Divine Love. It shines out, proceeds out the very heart, Being, nature of this awesome God. Why He should ever have any love for any one of us is a divinely hidden mystery - He did it out of His good pleasure, but it was His pleasure, was right for Him to do so. The love of God for us is an awesome mystery as to the why, but a glorious revelation as to its reality has occurred - see v9-10 *“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. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”*

Divine love is its own self generating cause and it is not attracted or drawn out by anything in us whatsoever. It flows spontaneously from the very heart and being of God. As such it is like God - unchangeable and infinite. We are to realise we have been loved with this everlasting love and loved before the creation of the world. Theologians speak of the Council of salvation where the ones God had set His love upon were given to the Son and the Son was willing to become their Saviour because He also loved them. The Holy Spirit loved them too and He would effectively bring the work of Christ to bear on their lives and they would know, experience and be transformed by the love of God in Christ in their salvation.

We were, as part of all mankind, dead in trespasses and sins - vile and disgusting in God's sight and there is and never could be anything to draw out love from God. Yet, He freely, deliberately, willingly set His love on a people - they were loved with an everlasting love and in the process of their lives were *“led by grace that love to know”*. That love, as v17 says, is made

complete in us - it is to be known, delighted in and shown. We are to dwell, live and abide in it (v16).

Just consider this love God 1st had for you and me. It is a totally unconditional love, not earned, merited or deserved by us in any way at all. We are to realise it is the wholehearted infinite love of God. Surely this must thrill us, take our breath away if we have come to know this love in and through our Saviour, the Lord Jesus! This is to affect us because we see this Divine Love has:

2. Stamped Love upon Our Souls.

“We love because He first loved us” - His love for us is the origin, the incentive, the motive and the first cause of our love – the love of God shed abroad in our hearts causes within us love for God and the Lord Jesus, love for our brothers and sisters, love for a world without God and hope. This self-generating, self-originating love of God for us, will by His grace, bring us to know that love as expressed and revealed in the person and work of the Lord Jesus (v9-10). We will come to see that *“God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* (Romans 5:8) and *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* (John 3:16) are true personally for and of us. When we trust the Lord Jesus as our Saviour we will come to see, recognise, grasp something of the love of God in Christ for us. It may stagger us, overwhelm us, but it should cause us to be thankful, eternally thankful and then draw out our love for Him in response.

Our personal experience of the love of God in Christ, should affect us and produce the response of love in us - *“We love Him because He first loved us”*. It has to be an inevitable response to such love. Yes, there may also be the response of *“On such love, my soul still ponder, love so great, so rich and free. Say, while lost in holy wonder, ‘Why O Lord such love to me?’”* Within us there should be a response of love - for the divine love of God in Christ has stamped love upon our souls. This love is to be going on and working out at 3 levels - to our God and Saviour, to brothers and sisters in Christ and to a lost world.

The cause of **our love to God** is the love of God to us. His love, as it comes to us, creates, generates love to Him within us as an outworking of the new life that He gives us. We have already seen this within this chapter. Our response to this love is to love Him. The fallen angels have no love for God and they continue on in their sin. There are those of fallen mankind, especially many of us here as individuals, who have experienced God’s love personally and we find we love Him because of all Jesus suffered for us spiritually there on Calvary and for all He has done and is doing and will do for us in our lives and future.

Some listening may have heard of the love of God revealed in Christ Jesus and it could mean little; if anything to you. You may have read the Gospels, heard John 3:16 but you have never personally experienced the love of God by trusting the Lord Jesus as your Saviour. Perhaps you have a perverse kind of logic *“I am too bad, He couldn’t love me or die for me!”* The staggering thing is that He did! None are too good and none are too bad! He saw you and me, in our lost and sinful state and He died so that ones like us could receive forgiveness of sin and

experience personally, know and delight in Him, His forgiveness and love for both time and eternity.

Sadly, you may keep away from this One who could do your soul such wonderful good and do it for various reasons. Please stop doing that and surrender to the demands of such love on your life. To know this love is wonderful, thrilling and you will find it causes, gives rise to a love to and for God that was never in place before.

Those of us who are believers, this is what we have found. Once we had no love, no care for God - maybe a fear, a superstitious fear, but having been led by grace that love to know, we found a love for God, for His Son the Lord Jesus, an appetite and desire to know Him better by prayer, by reading and hearing His word, by living to please Him. As we have done so, we have come to see that we didn't work up this love but He loved us 1st and we love Him because of such love being living and pulsating in our life.

We find that all true believers are in the same and glorious wonderful situation. None of us deserved the love of God and yet all are brought by the same grace to know this same love in Christ and we all love God. Because of this, we find that those who love God are our **brothers and sisters in Christ** and we find developing a love for them. We love them because God 1st loved us. This is what John has been coming back to time after time in chapter 4. There is no point saying we love God if we don't possess or are possessed with the love for other Christians. John will move on to develop this again in 4:20-5:1 – we as members of the same family of God must, should have a love for one another constantly.

This phrase “*we love*” is a present continuous tense - we are continually loving God, continually loving our brothers and sisters who we have seen. We are to love God so much as to want to be like Jesus and do all we can to be like Him. This involves loving His people, the church universal yes, but also the church local - which are the church visible to us and may even be the church irritable to us - those who can so easily rub us up the wrong way and we do the same to them! The love of God is to cause us to love even then!

This love of God is to cause us then **to look at the world around** not with resentment or bitterness, but with pity, love and compassion, for they are lost, as sheep without a shepherd, they are without God and without hope in the world. The love of God, love of Christ compels us to go to speak, to witness to them. We are to be moved to pray for those who will not, cannot pray for themselves. We are to go forth with the love of God to tell them of our Saviour and His love and to try to do them good as we have opportunity.

To have such love - love to God, to brothers and sisters and a lost world around us, are all evidences and encouragements that the God of heaven has 1st loved us and we have been brought by grace that love to know. Yes, we do love Him because He 1st loved us and we should remember and think on how lovely He is to us. Only love ravished souls are able to describe their relationship to God in terms of a love relationship.

Yet we do love brothers and sisters in Christ, because God 1st loved us and it affects our view of them. We know they are not perfect, but we know even more - we are not perfect either, so

we lovingly bear with, are patient with one another and we will work for and desire their good and blessing.

Incredibly we find ourselves loving even an antagonistic, bitter and evil world because we know this wonderful love of God in Christ Jesus and we want them to know the One who loved us 1st before we ever loved Him.

Although v19 is only a little verse, it has enormously magnificent truths that have even greater shock wave effects on our lives and the response from our hearts.

If anyone listening doesn't know this love, then I urge you to call on the God of heaven to make Himself and His love known to you.

Maybe there is a believer listening and you know you have wandered away, spurned such love, become cold to God and you are not enjoying His love in your life personally, nor towards His people and you simply don't tell of the Saviour and His love to the world around you. Then realise He would lovingly call you back to Himself and restore to you not only the sense of that love being active and pulsating in your life, but also the joy of your salvation as you delight in that love personally known and shown.

If we are delighting in Him and His love, even having ravishing experiences of it and Him, I pray this would long continue and it would become more and more obvious that we are our Beloved's and He is ours and that we would do nothing to spoil that lovely relationship but we would luxuriate in it and it would affect our lives and our witnessing of His love and care.