

Theme: God is Love.

Text: I J hn 4:16b -- "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."

Proposition: If you would abolish your fears and anxieties you must practice love for others, after the pattern of God in Jesus, so that you come to know by experience that God is love.

Date written: July 6, 1962

Dates and places used:

7/8/62 - Montrose, Colo.

10-10-65 - Blanca & Alamosa, Colo.

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Places and places used:

1962 - 1963 - 1964

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Introduction:

1. A simple but beautiful children's song that many of us know has the words: "Love him, love him, all ye little children. God is love.

God is love. Love him, love him, all ye little children, God is love. God is love." To hear a group of little children sing this is always a pleasure and a thrill for me.

Most people probably like it, but different reactions may arise as people think about the words "God is love." A reaction that I once overheard was simply "So what?"

2. To answer that ~~own~~ question, or at least to move a bit toward some answers, is our task here. We are convinced that because God is love, rather than something else, it does make a lot of difference.

3. We can find in the Scripture that we read today an outline which sketches the "so what" about this statement "God is love." This sketch is one which is accurate and timeless, we believe. It is something that has a message for us of today, even as it did for people of 1800 or 1900

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years ago. We will use this outline or sketch here to guide us in our consideration of our theme that "God is love," and why this fact makes a difference.

4. That God is love helps us solve many problems. One of these is that

I. Most of us are fearful and anxious people.

L. I know people who seem to me to be "off" religiously. To put it another way, they seem slightly insane from religion. Some of them have guessed out a system of horrible punishments which they think will overtake a person after death unless he reforms and lives worthily now. These folks are fearful of judgment. They think that God will condemn them to all of these horrible things at death if they fail to conform to God's law. They seek to live according to what they think the intent of God is, but are always fearful that they don't quite measure up.

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wait until after death to punish people for wrong doing. Sometimes religious speakers, leaders, and groups have been known to build up this fear and play on it to motivate people publicly to change to a christian life and to join a church. A typical effort of this type was an illustration used by W. E. Shepherd, a minister of 50 or more years ago. He said that

"A few years ago, on the island of Martinique, the people were so wicked that they drove the missionaries from their island. They got so heinously full of the devil that they crucified a hog in derision of Jesus Christ. God could not abide their crime. There lay near the foot of Mt. Pelee a city of some 35,000 people.

"When God got ready to pronounce his judgments on these people and upon that city, the rumbling of the mountain was heard; and when the experts went up there to see if there were any danger, they reported, "All is safe." But the rumblings began again, and the experts again reported, "all is safe." But the very reptiles, lizards and birds of the mountain side, had more sense than the people

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of ~~the~~ the city, for they left the mountain. God uncapped Pelee, and it vomited out its contents, and buried St. Pierre beneath its ashes.

"Early one morning a few years ago God began to shake San Francisco, probably the wickedest city in this nation. I have lived in that city, and conducted mission work there, and I know something of its crimes before high Heaven.

"God Almighty shook San Francisco until the buildings toppled down, and the earth opened up, and the people rushed to the streets, and were killed by the hundreds, the city was in a conflagration, and \$200,000,000 worth of property went up in smoke." (Henry M. Tyndall, ed. & pub. Illustrative Anecdotes, 1925, N.Y., # 904).

3. Frankly, it is difficult for me to think of God as directly, specifically and intentionally reaching into human history and activity to punish a person or a city, as this preacher so interpreted the happenings at St. Pierre and San Francisco. There are so many good people and too many fairly-christian communities

of that day, for they left the mountain. God escaped into the wilderness and his people, and he dwelt in the wilderness. There he dwelt for many years ago. "Early one morning a few years ago God began to shake San Francisco, probably the wickedest city in this nation. I have lived in that city, and conducted mission work there, and I know something of its crimes before this time.

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4. There are many other fears and anxieties which are rather common to the human race. The fear of death, of pain, of rejection and disapproval by others, are some of them. Anxiety is a state of tension and discomfort which is caused by unconscious fear of failure, or disapproval, or sicknaess, or something else undersirable.

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opposite is true, so that as one focuses his attention on other than himself his fears and anxieties are relieved or eliminated. This is where our Scriptural message steps in when it tells us that

II. To think about God as he is revealed by Christ focuses attention on other than self.

1. The Christian message about God presents God as one who cares immensely and intensely for each human being; for you and for me. Christ pointed out this love in teaching after teaching, and in practice. He compared God's loving care for the sparrows and for the lilies of the field to the love of God for each individual. Concluding that God loves even the minutest detail (the hairs of the head) of each person. God even let his son live and die on earth to demonstrate the great degree of love which he has for each and any person.

2. A person who thinks about the God shown by Christ can accept such concepts only if he is not

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II. "I think about God as he is
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2. A person who thinks about
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concentrating wholly upon himself.

As he thinks about God's magnificent love which he accepts so freely, the normal human reaction is one of love, or should be.

3. When you visit someone, whether for a meal, for overnight, or for a longer time, you consider it only common courtesy to write at least a thank-you note after your visit. Often you want to show your gratitude even more tangibly; and so you try to do something real nice for the one who has been so kind to you. Even so, one's gratitude and love to God often prompts him to do as much as he can for God. Something that is obviously possible close by which you can do for God is to seek to help and to serve God's other favorites, his other children, the people around you.

4. The Scripture writer points this out in these words of verses 7-8: "Beloved let us love one another, for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love." In verse 12 other words reinforce this

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concept: "if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us." Further on, he writes, "if any one says 'I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also.'" (20-21). Here it seems that the writer thinks that the only way to come to love God is to love other people first. As you come to love others whom you can see you become able to love God whom you have not seen. The wheel keeps turning, though, so that to please and know God you must work at loving and serving still more people. ~~Yxxxxxxxakxixixingxand sxxxxxxxstixixxxxxxxpeople~~

5. All this time, your attention is on others and on God much more than on yourself, so that

III. As you come to know the God of love your fears and anxieties are eased.

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before, perhaps here, or which you may have heard from other sources. The story goes that a retired minister received an invitation to the wedding of a niece. The invitation arrived too late for him to go or to send a gift, so he did the thing that seemed to him to be next best. He sent a telegram to her. True to his character, as a minister, he couched his message in Biblical terms. The telegram which he filed with the operator read: "Congratulations. I John 4:18. Love. Uncle John." I John 4:18, part of our present Scripture, has these words, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear." The telegraph operator was not real familiar with the New Testament, and in sending the message omitted the "I" in front of John, so that the bride opened her uncle's message to read, "Congratulations. John 4:18." Picking up her Bible she turned to this passage and read, "For you have had five husbands, and him who you now have is not your husband."

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is true: "There is no fear~~x~~ in love, but perfect love casts out fear." The verse continues, "For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love." Preceding this, in verse 17, are these words, "In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment." The writer is saying that as you come to know and to love God your fears and anxieties are eased.

Conclusion:

1. We could quote Bible passage after Bible passage to shore up the Scriptural statement that God is loving, kind and merciful, not vengeful, cruel and account-keeping. We could produce illustration after illustration from literature and life to illustrate that people who come to know and appreciate the christian God of love are transformed into loving, fearless, fine people.

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O God, we are incapable of understanding all about thy love for us. We only know that when we accept it we are filled with love for thee, so that we want to serve thee. The best way we know to do this is through loving and serving those who need us, because they are dear to thee.

Thou who art love, make us more loving.

In Jesus Name.

Amen.

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