

## **WE MUST TOUCH THEM**

### **I John 4:1-11**

How many times have I tried to tell a non-believer or an indifferent Christian of God's love only to have them say, "Oh, I know God loves me"? That has always been vexing to me because I knew that they could not truly know the love of God and remain indifferent to Him.

The thing is, they don't know at all that God loves them. What they know is that they have been told that God loves them. They know that God loves them in the same way that they know the pyramids are in Egypt. Knowing of the pyramids is informational, impersonal and makes no difference in the course of life. That is the way many people know God's love. It is informational, impersonal and makes no difference in their lives. They don't know God's love at all. What they have is a vague awareness of the information. For people to know that God loves them, His love must become experiential, personal, and meaningful. Absent of this, they will never truly know God's love.

First century Palestinians experienced God's love through Jesus. His life - the way he spoke, acted, related to people, and gave His life for them - was the living, practical embodiment of the love of the Father. They saw, heard, and experienced God's love through the incarnation, God in a human body.

"From the very first day, we were there, taking it all in - we heard it with our own ears, saw it with our own eyes, verified it with our own hands. The Word of Life appeared right before our eyes; we saw it happen! And now we're telling you in the most sober prose that what we witnessed was, incredibly, this: The infinite Life of God himself took shape before us."

### **I John 1:1-2 (*The Message*)**

As the "body of Christ", the church today is to "shape" the life of Christ and the love of God for this present world to see and experience. As Jesus was God incarnate in this world, so the church is Jesus incarnate in this world. John understood this, and I John 1:3 continues:

"We saw it, we heard it, and now we're telling you so you can experience it along with us, this experience of communion with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ." (*The Message*)

The contemporary world needs to experience the love of God through you, the Christ's one. If you and the church don't embody the love of God in attitude, word, and deed, this world will never know, believe, and accept the love of God no matter how much we say that God is love.

Enflesh the love of God to the world is what Jesus did. This is the reason for the incarnation.

"No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him." (John 1:18)

Jesus said he came to seek and to save those who are lost. Why? The love of God. He came to give His life a ransom for many. Why? The love of God. He came not to be served, but to serve. Why? The love of God. Jesus turned water to wine, healed the sick, delivered the demonized, debated the Pharisees, taught the disciples, fed the masses, fellowshiped with thieves, forgave the

sinner, and ultimately died by crucifixion. Why? Why did Jesus do what He did? Isn't it obvious? He did it all because of His love for people.

The supreme quality of Christian living is love. When we have experienced the love of God, we, too, are able to love.

“And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.... We love, because He first loved us.” (I John 4: 16,19)

The church must touch the world with God's love.

Two points of application: First, there is no more noble living for a Christian than to love; to love God and to love people. The only way people will come to genuinely know that God loves them is if you demonstrate God's love to them. Someone must touch them with the love of God. Otherwise, they will never know God's love. This priceless treasure will simply be to them like the pyramids: they have seen the pictures, but what difference does it make? The Christian life is not essentially about tradition and ceremony (Mark 7:7), about rules and regulations (Matthew 23:23), about ethical standards and moral codes (Matthew 23:4), about serving the needs of an organization which meets in a building with a steeple on top (Mark 2:27). These things are valuable only when and if they communicate God's love. Without love, these trappings of modern Christianity turn God into a joy-killing ogre rather than a life-giving Savior. Being a Christian, first and above all else, is about love: being loved by God, loving God, and embodying His love to other people. These are the greatest commandments.

The second point of application: If you know that you cannot touch others with this kind of love, it may be that you have never experienced this kind of love. You cannot give away what you do not have. When John wrote above in verse 16, “We have come to know and have believed the love of God,” he uses the perfect tense verb. In the Greek, the perfect tense indicates action completed in the past with lasting, ongoing results. Having experienced God's love, we continue to experience His love and its effect on our lives. *The Message* translates I John 4:19 this way:

“We, though, are going to love-love and be loved. First we were loved, now we love.”

Do *you* - not someone else, but *you*, do *you* - know that God loves *you* right now? Do you rest confidently in peace and assurance, knowing that He will love you tomorrow and the day after and the day after that, from now on through eternity...no matter what happens? Can you understand that? I can't. But I can believe it. Jesus' love, forgiveness, and mercy for you surpasses your ability to comprehend it. Yet He says that His grace is always abounding toward you. That, you must believe. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ “has a single relentless stance toward us: He loves us.”

When our children were small and Connie would pray with them at bedtime, she would always say as she kissed them goodnight, “Mommy loves you, but Jesus loves you more”...more than she or they could comprehend. Greater than a parent's love for a child is our Heavenly Father's love for us: tender, gentle, everlasting, unconditional.

Be convinced of that. If you are not, you have not experienced the sweetness of God's liberating love. You may have heard about it; you may be saved; you may have surrendered and repented; your sins may be forgiven, and you may go to heaven. But unless you are convinced of God's *unconditional love*, you don't know the profound depths of the love God has for you and the freedom and joy He gives. Brennan Manning says in *The Ragamuffin Gospel* that God, "...is not moody or capricious; He knows no seasons of change. He has a single relentless stance toward us: He loves us. He is the only God man has ever heard of who loves sinners. False gods-the gods of human manufacturing-despise sinners, but the Father of Jesus loves all, no matter what they do." If you don't know this quality of God's love, you cannot touch others with His love. You can't give away what you do not have. You cannot be convinced that God always, at any moment, loves you. The result is that you are always on the debilitating, futile, performance-based religious treadmill trying to earn from God what you already have by grace. And, you will never be able to share with conviction the unconditional nature of God's love with others. However, when this truth does "get" you, it will transform your life. You *will* love. Your heart will be regularly and increasingly filled with His love. Then you can embody His love to others. You can touch them with His love because you have been touched by His love. I tell you from experience, such love is both transforming and liberating. It is...

Grace to you,

Stephen N. Johnson

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