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All you need is love

1 John: Confidence and faith - Session 6

To show us what life looks like in God's family – and that love, as God defines it, is very important from 1 John: 4:7-12.

Q1. Think of a particular family member or good friend...how do you know they love you?

1 John 4:7-12

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 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. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

Q2. According to John, how do we know God loves us?

(Note: the word 'atonement' means to give satisfaction or make amends¹.)

- He sent His son into the world to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:9).
- He did this on His own initiative, while we were undeserving, because of our sin – *'not that we loved God, but that he loved us'* (1 John 4:10).

Q3. 'This is love...' (1 John 4:10). What is love?

- Love is an action! God sent His son to die when we didn't deserve it.
- Love is an action that does what is in the best interests of others. God sent His son to atone for our sin.

Q4. How does this differ from how society around us understands love?

Q5. If God is love, then is God in a position to be able to make negative judgements on us, or our behaviour?

- 'God is love' doesn't mean that God can't judge. It's like with a parent - would it be loving of a parent to not judge a child's decision to cross the road in front of

¹ Collins Gem English Dictionary, London: Collins & Sons, 1980.

oncoming traffic? To not discipline them when they did? To not set boundaries for when they approach roads in the future? Love is not in opposition to judgment – love will lead, in the right circumstances, to judgment.

• It's clear from the passage itself that God makes negative judgements – He sent Jesus as an atoning sacrifice. It's in the Cross that we see both God's justice (sin is punished) and His love (Jesus taking the punishment which means that we can have relationship with God).

Q6. Is John saying that only followers or Jesus are capable of loving people?

• No! But if you are in God's family (born of God) and know God ("know" in a relationship sense) then you will love people because God loves.

Q7. For followers of Jesus, what does this passage teach about what loving others should look like?

• Loving like God does – actions that benefit the other person.

• Loving others is not same as uncritically accepting everything. Loving other people might mean pointing out where there has been wrong-doing (in a loving way).

Tolerance is not uncritically accepting everything – tolerance is actually being able to disagree with people and still stay in relationship with them.

How can followers of Jesus grow in their love for others? Here's what City Bible Forum staff member Caroline Spencer had to say:

"As a follower of Jesus, I know that I should love other people by acting in their best interests. This can be an enormous challenge at times – it's easier just to put myself first rather than put myself out for other people. But I know that it's the right thing to do – because that's how God wants me to respond to his declaration of love for me. (1 John 4:11, *'since God so loved us, we should love one another'*.) And the nature of love is that it will cost me something – because it cost God a lot to nail His only Son to the cross.

A question I have been thinking about recently is how do I grow in my love for others? And what is the connection between God's love for me and my love for others? As I started to think about it, I realised there are parallels with presents that friends give to me, and how I respond to those friends.

So suppose a friend gives me a present from Daiso (if you haven't been to a Daiso store, everything there costs \$2.80). Now while Daiso has some great stuff (I really like these magnetic baskets that you can put on your fridge for pens etc) I'd only have a certain level of excitement getting something there. If my friend then said "do you mind cooking dinner for me once a week?" (my friend knows I love to cook) I'd maybe do it once or twice but definitely not every week!

Or suppose I was swimming at a beach and being swept by a strong current. Suppose my friend, at great risk to herself, rescued me. If my life is pretty precious to me, my friend's action would mean a lot. If my friend then said "do you mind cooking dinner for me once a week?" then I'd make the time for it. Perhaps even

take them out for a special meal from time to time as well. There's very little I wouldn't do for someone I owed my life to.

So if I want to grow in my love for others, then the place to start is realising that Jesus' sacrifice for me isn't just a present from Daiso. It's the rescue of my very life. If I see it that way, then it's going to make a huge impact not just on the way I respond to Jesus himself – but also how I treat others (knowing that how I treat others will please him too). My attitudes and behaviour will change – and change in the right way. See, if it's all about just trying harder for the sake of trying harder, then the dangers are that I will become proud (see how good I am God!) or judgemental (those other followers of Jesus aren't doing as much as I am) – or both. Whereas if the place to start is Jesus' sacrifice for me – God's love – then I will love others more in a way that is thankful (to God for all that he has done for me) and humble.”

Getting back to John's letter ...

1 John 5:13

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Note: By “know” John means that his readers might have greater confidence and assurance in what they believe.

Q8. How does this section from 1 John on love help the readers with their confidence and assurance?

· Because God's love came at his own initiative – not theirs! God didn't love them because they deserved it – after all he had to send His Son as an atoning sacrifice. It might be tempting to think that if God's love is undeserved then this undermines confidence because we can't contribute to it. But the reverse logic gives greater confidence – because it is wholly of God's initiative, then we are freed from the pressure of trying to measure up. It is then the object of our confidence that becomes important, rather than our own performance. The costliness of the sacrifice – the lengths God went to in sending His Son – would give them confidence also.

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