



Looking Inwards (15 mins)
Caring For Each Other

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however: 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins)
Concern For Others

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?

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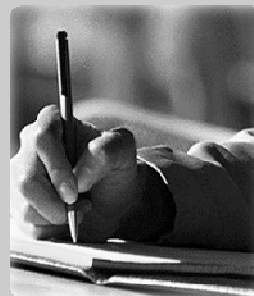


HG111: Fruit That Is Never Out Of Season
Love: God's Greatest Gift

1 John 4:7-21

Home Group Study Notes

13 September 2015 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

Share one experience and/or event (whether on holiday; at home; or in a newspaper, magazine, book or on TV) which has had an impact on your Christian life over the summer.



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1: How would you describe the word love, in one sentence, to a visitor from another world?

2: What strikes you most about the love of God?

3:1 John 4:10 is always a challenging verse when we consider our relationships with other members of our church family. If love, as the Apostle Paul suggests, is "... *practical and costly* ..." What might you be able to put in place that will improve your relationships with others?

I don't believe we can love as God himself would love if we have not fallen 'head over heels' in love with God. You don't have a love for others, then you need Jesus in your heart. When we totally surrender to love then, and only then will we know we are loved and only then can we totally love others.

5. We are able, through God's love, to love others vs 16-21

It should be perfectly natural for us to love our neighbour as ourselves if we truly love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. In Romans 13:9-10 we see that all the commandments are summed up in this one rule: Love your neighbour as yourself. Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore, love is the fulfilment of the law. Loving as God loves us, involves loving our neighbours, our enemies, those for whom it may be difficult to get along with. Jesus said: Love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! That you may be sons of your Father in Heaven (Matthew 5:44).

I know many of us struggle when it comes to that – and I'm no exception. I'm certainly not exempt from the struggles of life that many of you are. How do we deal with it? Sometimes we need to tell God, not just others, exactly how we feel and ask for a love and compassion for those who wrong us - 70 x 7 and all the rest. But quite simply, we need more of God's love. When we are loved by love itself, we can only respond by loving where there is little love to be found.

When Christians begin to act like Christians and love God, love their neighbours as themselves, love their enemies and love their Christian brothers/sisters, regardless of colour, race or class then we will see society change for the better. The world will marvel when they see our loving attitudes and actions. The writer, and well known atheist, Bertrand Russell once commented: *The only hope I can see for the future of mankind is what I, as an atheist, can only call Christian love.*

Conclusion

Vs20: If anyone says 'I love God' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. God cannot use the loveless Christian for his glory. You may consider yourself to be quite an intellect and be able to put up an amazing apologetic for the Christian faith. You could be one of the most dynamic do-gooders around. You may be able to understand, even explain, the complex nature of God, but if it is not under-girded with the deep deep love of Jesus (as the old hymn writer put it) we are, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:1 *a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal*. Paul goes onto say in vs2 if: *I have faith that could move mountains but have not love, I am nothing*. What does our Christian action achieve without love?

Much has been given to us in order that we recognise that we are loved. The cross of Jesus secured the fact that we are deeply, dearly and undeservedly loved. How do we respond? We love in response. Since the greatest commandment is to love God, we are to give Him our first love, never allowing anyone or anything to come before Him. However, we are to express agape love to others, a love no less in its quality and magnitude than that which we express toward God and receive from Him.

A Prayer

Lord, you would never have commanded us to love had You not intended to enable and empower us to do so. Therefore, on the authority of Your command for us to love, and on the authority and promise of Your Word that You will hear and answer when we pray according to Your will, we claim Your love, the 1 Corinthians 13 kind of love, for You, for all people, but especially for ourselves. AMEN.

It's often used at a wedding but it wasn't written for newlyweds, but for the church/community at large about how we should conduct our relationships. It applies to all of us! *Love is patient. Love is kind. Love does not envy, love does not boast, love is not proud. Love is not rude, love is not self-seeking, love is not easily angered, love keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.* Is that how you love?

Paul describes love in a positive and negative sense. He portrays love's positive characteristics as patience and kindness, delighting in the truth, and a protective, trusting, hopeful, and persevering attitude. Love's negative characteristics are seen as rudeness, boasting, pride, self-seeking - in short, what we might consider unacceptable behaviour. Furthermore, love covers the faults of others rather than delighting in them.

It is often said that love is a verb. A verb is a doing word. Love isn't a feeling or an experience (though, admittedly, it's both of those) it's what we do to/for others that shows how much we love. To practise love is to reflect the character and concerns of God as he has shown himself to us in Jesus. It's interesting that Paul uses words that are all in the present, continuous tense, indicating that they are actions, and attitudes, which are ingrained in us by force of habit. Actions that appear quite ordinary and obvious, yet their simplicity hides the fact that they are probably the most difficult habits for us to cultivate. Why? Because, quite simply ...

4. We can't Love in our own Strength vs 13-15

We can't demonstrate agape love, God's unconditional love for others, through our own efforts because our hearts aren't big enough. By nature, we are not patient or kind. By nature, we are jealous, envious and boastful. By nature, we are proud, selfish and rude. By nature we demand our own way. We could never love others the way God loves us. It's an impossibility.

I don't know about you, but my heart isn't big enough to forgive those who hurt me. My heart isn't big enough to forgive those who cost lives through initiating war and genocide. My heart isn't big enough to absorb all the pain around me in this church, community, nation, world ... I need something more to help me to cope and I need something that puts my own feelings and my own pride to one side. I need something that puts my life into its true perspective - remembering the dying love of Jesus on the cross does all that for me.

When Jesus comes into our lives we receive the Holy Spirit (vs13) and through this, God enables and empowers us to be a different kind of person. He provides us with a new kind of love altogether, the purest, deepest kind of love imaginable and He wants to produce this agape love in us through the Empowering Presence of Holy Spirit in our lives. If Jesus is in us, we are complete. How? Because Jesus himself is perfect. He is perfect love, perfect peace, perfect patience, perfect kindness. He is the supreme example of love and He lives in us - amazing isn't it. And as we live with Jesus in our hearts, our love grows more perfect and complete.

As the old saying goes, If we get the vertical right then the horizontal will take care of itself. That is, if we get our relationship right with God then our relationship with each other will fall into place. It makes sense doesn't it? But I can't help wondering if we struggle with our relationships because our relationship with God is not what it should be.

The person who has not yet learned to love God and to seek Him above all else and all others is to be pitied. Such a person is only denying himself the blessings that await all who love God with all their heart, soul and mind. This perfect love only comes when we acknowledge Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, vs15. At the centre of our love/lives should be the heart of God himself.

4: What we do for ourselves but not for someone else? What does it *really* mean to love our neighbours as ourselves?

5: Discuss the merits of Bertrand Russell's comment: *The only hope I can see for the future of mankind is what I, as an atheist, can only call Christian love.*

Meditation: Picture someone who needs your help, your care, your support, your compassion. An outcast, a refugee, an enemy, someone, perhaps, who you'd prefer not to have anything to do with: someone who makes your life difficult ... put aside all your prejudices as you do this. Picture yourself walking along the road with your arm around them, loving them just as Jesus loved you. Think about what practical thing you can do to show your commitment to Jesus by loving that person, unconditionally.

Try this for two minutes every day and think of someone different each time.



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



HG111: Fruit That Is Never Out Of Season Love: God's Greatest Gift

1 John 4:7-21

Home Group Sermon Notes

13 September 2015 - Revd Paul A. Carr

1. What is Love?

Most psychologists agree that man's greatest need is to love and be loved. Love permeates through the whole of society. Love is a word that's on everybody's lips. There are more songs sung about it, poems written about it and books romanticising about it than any other subject in the world - apart from Jesus. A BBC survey a couple years ago suggested that 78% of people would rather be loved than have money in the bank! We might well ask ourselves the question: What is Love? Love has been hijacked by so many conflicting emotions, where what we feel is all that matters and what we do is irrelevant.

The Christian poet, Steve Turner, wrote a humorous ditty entitled the Humanist's Love Poem and it goes like this: *Why don't we try loving each other? (A strange collection of atoms I am) Feeling this molecular urge for you. We must chemically react if we can.* Well, that's one definition of love - not a helpful one at that - but how do we define love?

2. God is Love vs 7-9

I'm sure you're aware that the NT was originally written in Greek and uses several words to describe love. However, when we use the word love in the English language we only use one word and, because of that, we actually diminish its depth and meaning. For instance, if I say I love Paula it means I love her - of course it does! If I say I'd love a bag of chips it's still the same word but with a totally different emphasis. Does it mean that I love Paula on the same level as a bag of chips? Of course it doesn't. You may be familiar with some of these Greek words for love:

- *Eros* is a word that suggests sensual desire.
- *Phileo* is used for friendship, or love of friends or relatives (and conveys a sense of loving someone because he is worthy of our love).
- *Storge* Parental love for children
- *Agape* is God's love. The purest, deepest kind of love expressed not through mere emotions, but as an act of will.

God's love is love for the utterly unworthy. It's given by God himself without any merit or qualification on our behalf. It's lavished without a thought as to whether the recipient is worthy to receive it or not. God loves us in spite of our disobedience, our weaknesses, our sin and our selfishness. Nothing you or I could ever do would cause God to love us more or less than he does. God's love for us is perfect and complete. It is endless, boundless and unconditional. And it is this same divine, sacrificial, costly, unconditional, everlasting, inexhaustible, overwhelming, unchanging, supernatural love that God offers to us. As we saw in Galatians 5:22, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. During this series we're going to be looking each these individually.

God's love completely transcends all human ideas or expressions of love. He revealed his supernatural, sacrificial love for us by sending, and allowing, his only Son to die on the cross for our sins. *Greater love has no man than this, than a man lay down his life for his friends* (John 15:13.)

3. God's love is shown in how Christian's love one another vs 10-12

1 John 4:10: *'This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.'* Have you ever thought that the person sitting next to you or in front of you is not just an acquaintance who happens to be around on a Sunday? If they are believers in Jesus, they are your brothers and sisters in Christ.

In Romans 12:1-8, the same note of 'sacrificial love' is struck when Paul comes to discuss the gifts of the Spirit. Before he has even mentioned any of the gifts, he writes: *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship.* Here again Paul emphasizes the need to be full of *agape* love for both God and for others if the gifts are to be a blessing to the Church.

Sometimes it seems to me that we spend more time arguing and fighting with each other than we do encouraging each other. Have you found that? It's obviously an issue in the church at large because the Church of England have produced a document 'Getting On Together' to explain what is and isn't acceptable behaviour in churches and relates to bullying etc. We discussed this at DCC - I'll put the document up on the website next to the notes for this talk if you are interested in reading it through. We just can't take for granted that Christians know how to behave and how to love. Jesus gave us a new commandment in John 13:34-35: *Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love and another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples.*

This word *agape*, as I mentioned earlier, is used to describe the love that Christians should show in their relationship with one another. Christians are to love, because they belong to God and because, as we saw a little earlier, God is love (1 John 4:8). It is this *agape* love that should characterise the Christian community if that community is to stand apart, in any way, from the love that exists in the world and, more than anything, if the love of the Christian community is to be recognised as one filled with the love that comes from God.

Whilst we know a Spiritual Gift is given to whom God chooses, (it's interesting to note that love is not listed as a Spiritual Gift in 1 Corinthians 12 - 14) the Fruit of the Spirit, however, is for every one of us who are Christians - when the natural outpouring of the love of God in our hearts should be a natural outpouring of the Fruit of the Spirit in our lives - Fruit that is never out of season! It's also very interesting to note that the great chapter on love, 1 Corinthians 13, sits in between two chapters on Spiritual Gifts. Paul constructs his argument in chapters 12-14 in this way:

A: 1 Corinthians 12: The Gifts of the Spirit

B: 1 Corinthians 13: A Celebration of Love

A: 1 Corinthians 14: The Gifts of the Spirit

Love, and I don't know if you've ever thought about it this way, is the reason and the way God's gifts are given to the church. No one can miss the importance of the central passage about love in this design. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul stresses the need for *agape*, for self-sacrificial love, if the gifts are to be employed responsibly and constructively. If love is so fundamental, so important and so irreplaceable for our life together as Christians, we need to know more clearly what it is. So let's remind ourselves of those verses from 1 Corinthians 13 a passage recognised, because of the eloquence and splendour of its language, as one of the greatest pieces of literature ever written on the theme of love.