



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 sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

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

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HG174 Walking In The Light True Love

1 John 4:1-21

Home Group Study Notes

4 November 2018 - Pauline Woolnough



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 for your discussions.




Welcome (10 mins) Ice Breaker

In the space of one minute how many songs can you think of with the word *love* in its title?



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 ...



HG174 *Walking In The Light*
True Love
 1 John 4:1-21
 Home Group Sermon
 4 November 2018 - Pauline Woolnough

Introduction In Ch 4 John addresses the subject of love telling his readers that it is the character, nature and essence of God to love and we see it revealed in His Son Jesus Christ who died so that we might live. His love is perfected in his people as they love others.


Test The Spirits He starts by drawing a contrast between true prophets and false prophets, V1-6. The word “*antichrist*” simply means against Christ, or enemies of Christ and although in Rev 13:2-3 John warns us of “*The Antichrist*” who is to come at the end of the age here he tells us that the “*spirit of the antichrist*” v3, was alive and well back when he wrote this letter and is very much alive today. There is a spirit behind every prophet and not every one is from God. Antichrists are liars. They deny Jesus as the Messiah and that he came and lived and died in human form, they redefine him and diminish his Person and work, they chip away at his deity and reject his work of atonement and not surprisingly they have worked their way into the church. The greatest dangers are not always from without but from within, not every spiritual teacher is credible, not every prophet is from God, and we are to maintain a healthy spiritual skepticism and test the origin and source of the message of those who teach and lead us. They can deceive us in many ways and trap us doctrinally, morally and socially leading us to believe wrong things about our Saviour, live sinful lifestyles and fail to love others as God has loved us. We must know what prophets believe about Jesus and who they say he is and although they may appear more intellectual than us and their arguments may be persuasive, John goes on to reassure us that we are God’s children and that the One who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world, v4. There is a battle raging for the hearts and minds of people so we must know the truth and stand for what is right. Our strength and safety is in testing the spirits, confessing Christ as Lord trusting the Holy Spirit within us and staying close to the Word.

True Love - GOD IS LOVE John mentions the word “*love*” 27 times in Ch 4, he is often referred to as the apostle of love and in 4:7-21 he goes to the very source and origin of love, God Himself. In v 8 he says that “*God is love,*” note he doesn’t say “*Love is God.*” In many ways we have turned this phrase around and corrupted our understanding of love. We have turned love into something that makes us feel good and think that it’s permissible to sacrifice moral principles and others rights as long as we obtain “*love.*” That is not God’s kind of love. His love is holy, perfect and just. If we want to describe the ultimate form of authentic love then we need only to look at the cross because the cross gives us the description of the love of God. John gives us the definitive definition of love in vs 9-10.

4. “*Perfect love casts out fear.*” v18. What are you afraid of and what can fear reveal about our relationship with God?

5. Why is it impossible to love an invisible God if we do not love our brothers and sisters and why does John focus on love for other Christians?

6. What is the difference between peace-making and appeasement and what is unsatisfactory about the latter. Remember that the peace that God secured was costly.



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



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. Why do you think that false prophets are still a problem in the church today and how can we identify them?

2. Many people, even some Christians find it difficult to think of God being angry and punishing sin. How do you answer those who say that the “*God of wrath*” belongs to the Old Testament while the God of the New Testament is “*love?*”

3. What differences are there between God’s wrath and human anger?

“*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*”.

We may all have experienced love, love from a partner, a parent a child but John says that there is only one act of pure love that has been performed in the whole of history unsullied by any ulterior motive or gain, and that is the self giving love of God in Christ on the cross for undeserving sinners. Without Christ and his cross, we would never have known what true love is.

In giving his Son God gave everything he had to give, he held nothing back. His love is laid bare on the cross outside the city gates, in a place where outcasts belonged and helpless before the world that he loves. God made himself vulnerable to the possibility that *they/we*, would reject him and turn away from him. They did then, and we do today. It is important that we understand that God doesn't love us because Jesus died for us, Jesus died for us because God loves us. John Stott says that “*It cannot be emphasised too strongly that God’s love is the source, not the consequence of the atonement.*” and P.T Forsyth expressed it this way, “*the atonement did not procure grace, it flowed from grace.*” Both Father and Son suffered the consequences of their surrender, the Son suffered the physical trauma of death, but the Father suffered as he watched the death of His Son. The Father’s grief is just as important as the Son’s death.

True Love Takes Away Our Sins That God is holy is foundational to biblical teaching, sin is incompatible with his holiness. The background to the cross is not only the sin of human beings but God’s just and holy reaction to it. David said - “*Against you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.*” Ps 51:4. We can name any number of sins and grade them in what we consider to be in order of seriousness but Jesus says that every sin is a breach of the first and greatest command to love God with all our “*heart, soul and mind,*” Matt 22:37. We don’t do that and we go even further - we actively refuse to acknowledge him as Creator, we refute his Lordship, we deny his existence and his relevance today and even when we do acknowledge him we choose to disobey him. We live our lives not dependent *on* Him as he intended but independent *of* him. We place ourselves above him and rebel against him. The extreme gravity of sin is a wilful rebellion against God and the “*created*” insults and snubs the majesty of the creator. Sin dishonours and offends God but whilst loving sinners he refuses to condone our sin because his love is a holy love. One of our biggest problems is that we don’t consider the seriousness of our sin and we fail to respect the holy, moral, righteous character of God as we try to bring him down to our level and our way of thinking.

To understand the cross we need a balanced understanding of the gravity of sin and the majesty of our holy God. When we diminish one we diminish the other. When we label sin as a misdemeanour or a lapse in behaviour rather than rebellion and when we see God as an indulgent loving Father rather than an indignant holy Creator and Lord, then the cross can appear superfluous.

It wasn’t Jesus and his atoning death on the cross that changed God, God’s character is unchanging, *he* is unchanging, he did not change from wrath to love or from enmity to grace, the atonement didn't change his view of us, and it didn't change how much he loved us, it changed how he dealt with us. He didn't suddenly in Jesus become nicer and more loving, he always was, he didn't love us more after the atonement, he loved us before, - it was sin that he hated.

Before the atonement our sin was the barrier that kept us from standing before him, now we can stand alongside our Saviour in the Father's presence because once and for all, after the cross, Jesus removed the barrier of sin, God forgave us and welcomed us home. No longer do we need to fear punishment because love is confident and bold and the love of God drove out fear.

True Love Loves Others There is a response we have to make to the love that God has shown. 11-12 "*Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.*" If God loves us so completely then surely out of gratitude to him and our relationship with him we ought to love others. Its just what we should do because of who we now are. God's Spirit now lives in us, we have experienced his love for us through Christ's sacrifice, loving one another should be second nature to us. No one has ever seen God, even Moses had to hide his face on Mt Sinai but John says here in v 12 that we can see God in the lives of those who show his love to others.

The Power Of His Love However, its easy to say we should love one another but its not always easy to do. Loving our enemies is hard but loving our brothers and sisters can be hard too, it is also sometimes difficult to grasp the fact that we are unconditionally loved by God. John understands all these things, he knows we need help, he also knows that God Himself through His Spirit provides all the help we need. In vs 13-14 we see how John weaves the Trinity into his letter and again refers to the evidence of God's amazing love for us. "*This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.*"

When we confess Jesus as Lord, God gives us his Spirit to abide in us. We may not always feel that truth, but it is biblical truth, faith is not about how we feel its about knowing that God is faithful. He will never take his Spirit from us, he is ours forever and because of his love so lavishly poured out on us we are moved to love others. Because of his love John urges us to, "*testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world,*" v14. Jesus came to die for the world, not just for us, we have a duty to tell others about God's love and there is an urgency about doing this. Carl Henry said, "*The gospel is only good news if it gets there in time.*" Loving others, confessing Christ as Saviour, abiding in God and possessing His Spirit all have consequences not only for the present but for the day in the future when we will stand before God on the day of judgement, when His perfect love will have done its work and He will look at us in the same way that he does His Son, with absolute love.

The Command to Love In Matthew 22:36-40 Jesus addressed the two great commands, love God and love others, saying that loving your neighbour is like loving God, now John says in v 20 that it is impossible to say you love God yet not love your neighbour, it just doesn't work and we are liars if we say we love God yet don't show love to our neighbour. If we are not loving others as we should then we don't know God's love as we should. Jesus said that those who have been forgiven much will love much Luke 7:47, we have been forgiven everything! John now says, "*How can we love God whom we cannot see if we don't love those that we can see?*" v 20. God does not just talk about love, he is a God who acts and shows his love through his Son, the Serv-

ant King, and just as his love was on show publicly for all to see on a Roman cross 2000 yrs ago so today it must be seen in action in his children.

Conclusion Love is at the very heart of the bible, it is divine and defined in the death of Jesus, it is fundamental to the character of God and as God's love is holy and principled so our love must be consistent with holiness. If we say that we love God then we *must* love other Christians who are our brothers and sisters, we should never forget that our relationship with our Heavenly Father grafts us into a whole new family of his other children that he also loves.

We Christians are often charged with displaying a lack of love preferring instead to condemn and accuse others about the nature of *their* sin whilst sometimes hiding our own. People have disagreements over what true love means and often when love is spoken about today it means romantic love, it is rarely talked about in the context of the widely held Christian belief and understanding of love. We will disagree with the lifestyle choices of many today, both Christians and non Christians, and whilst we may have a huge passion for God's truth and his Word we may still lack grace and sensitivity. On the other hand we may have all the grace and sensitivity we need yet lack the courage to speak up for the truth because we don't want to upset anyone. Jesus spoke the truth with both grace and sensitivity, he didn't have to agree with someone or their lifestyle. We are called to be like him, to be "*imitators of God,*" Eph 5.5.

We don't get to choose who we love, we are simply to love because "*God is love*" and if our lives are not characterised by a God-like love that cares, even for our enemies, then we don't know God, v7. The Message translation of v 21 is this, "*The command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both.*" As Christians we are given all the help we need through the Holy Spirit to love, and whilst we are to resist sin, attitudes and lifestyle choices that are inconsistent with the truth, we are still to love and to treat every single person with equal dignity and respect regardless as to how they behave or what they believe as we are all, every one of us, sinners, made in His image, and we all carry something of His image within us.

