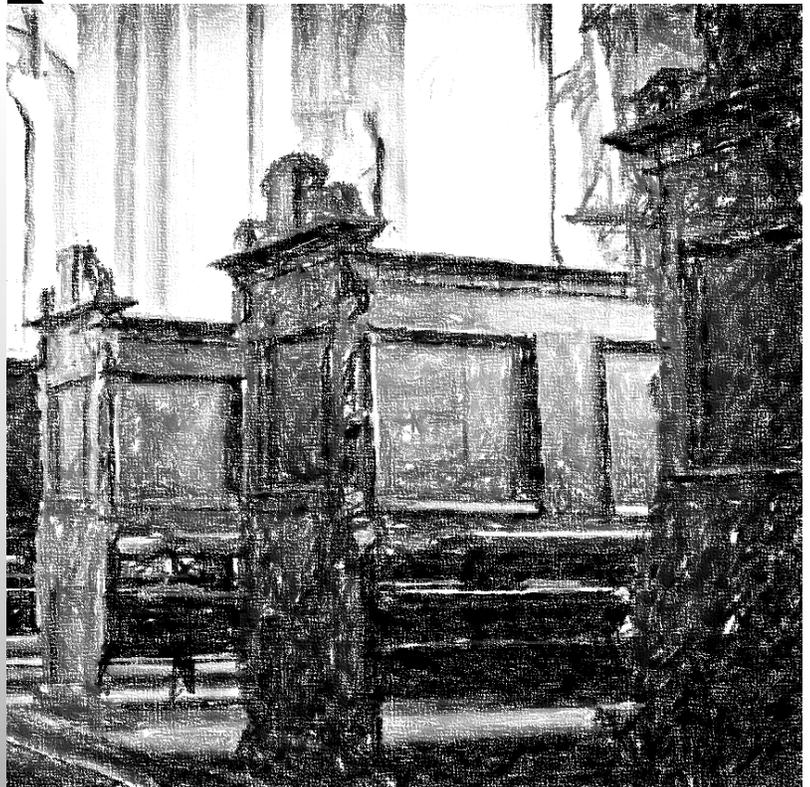




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# The Epistle of First John

Responding to Threats Against The Church's One Foundation

1 John 4:11-21

In the end portion of the fourth chapter, John covers the idea of love – the source and motivation of love for the Christian. But one must keep in mind that God's love is not just a mere motion. Love is also not a particular virtuous act. Oh no, that would be defining love too narrowly. The love of God is more significant than a mere emotion or a one-time-good-deed. But instead, the love of God is in Christ. And this love of Christ? It defines the church.

Love is not just a response to a command or a threat. Love is not motivated by fear. Love is reciprocal – it flows from Jesus. And this love of Christ creates community as a whole. The love of Christ is not for individuals separate from the church – isolated as lone Christians.

As far as reciprocal love? If God loves us, we should love Him back – right? Yes, it is good to love the one that loves us; however, this is not John's focus. When we talk about God's love in the life of Christians, that love flows out to one's neighbor. (Remember that it has been said before that God does not *need* our good works – love – but our

neighbor does. Thus a loving congregation is a loved congregation. A congregation cannot properly love without being loved first.

John also uses the word 'abide' much in this section and elsewhere. He calls Christians to abide with the Lord. But what does it mean to abide? Simply stated, to abide is to continue in the Lord's love. To abide is to remain where God's love may continue to shine on the Christian.

Think back to Jesus' illustration in John 15. Jesus says that He is the true vine and that we are the branches. Branches that are not connected to the true vine cannot produce fruit and do not live independently but shrivel up and die. No abiding with Jesus – we can do nothing. However, when we are connects to the true vine (abiding) we bear much fruit.

Way too often we get this strange urge to think that Christianity is all about some sort of progress. The idea goes like this: 1) We get Jesus, 2) However, getting Jesus is not good enough; we are lazy Christians if all we are

doing is abiding, 3) We must venture off as heroes to some unknowing territory, compelled by God's love. Alas! We never stop abiding in the Lord's love! To stop abiding with the Lord and act like we've got things under control looks like the Prodigal Son leaving his Father's house! Keep in mind though, some are sent. But when they are *sent* the Lord goes with them, so that they will never stop abiding. Consider Moses and the Prophets – they were sent, but they were not sent as independent autonomous people – alone. The Lord did not forsake them or leave them. But the Lord abided with them and they with Him.

There is more to this idea of abiding. When we abide with the Lord and the Lord with us (in His church via the Word and Sacraments), there is no fear. To abide in the love of God is to live free from the fear of God – as a Judge! But how often do we act from the motivation of fear? We fear many things in this love, and thus we act in ways to satisfy our fear. Fear of a boss, fear of losing our good reputation, and fear of God will cause us to act and do things not out of love or for the sake of love! And so, fear is a lousy motivator. Sure, threats, punishments, and judgment can yield results, but they do so without true love. Love, though.... Abiding love goes the way of fulfillign the Ten Commandments, while honoring and relying on the source of love – Jesus Christ.

The Christian loves not out of the context of fear, for that would not be true love. But the Christian loves because he/she has been first loved by God in Christ. Again, as mentioned before, if a Pastor wants a loving church, he shall preach about the love of Christ so that love happens. Sure the pastor can get results through manipulation and fear; however, that will only be temporary and fleeting.

It cannot be stressed enough the importance of abiding in Christ's love via the church, where the Word and Sacraments are continually delivered. Without the Word and Sacraments (the delivery of Jesus' love) how can the church abide? And if the church cannot abide, how can the church be sustained?

In conclusion – shame on anyone who talks about love without referencing or considering the love of God first. Shame on those those attempt to move Christians away from the simple goal of abiding in Christ and Christ abiding with them. Abiding is the goal of every Christian – not some foolish game of enlightenment progress!

We Christians abide. And as we abide, we are loved, so that we might love others.





