



St. Paul's Lutheran Church
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The Epistle of First John

Responding to Threats Against The Church's One Foundation

1 John 4:7-10

In the previous study, John talked about the right confession – the importance of right belief. In the verses for this study, John talks about the need for love. In other words, just as Truth is not located or conjured up from within the caverns of mankind, true love does not originate from mankind as well. The logic goes like this: those who belong to God – who is Truth – will have and speak Truth. Those who belong to the Lord – who is love – will have and share love. Because love is of God, those who belong to God have love for one another.

This consideration brings up three obvious observations. First, when we Christians fail to love our neighbor properly, God cannot be blamed for this, which means that it is our old Adam at work again. If the church is accused of being non-loving, and if it is an accurate accusation/observation, the problem does not rest on God but the old Adam of the unloving church. And so, the solution is not to

try and love more but repent of not loving with the love that has come from God.

Secondly, one cannot properly love without the love of our Triune God. Human love, no matter how noble and highly motivated it is, falls short if it refuses to include the Lord God as the source of love. *[Too often we hear about love in our culture, but the love that is in our culture is not of God because it is often contrary to His 10 Commandments. We must not forget that the spirit of love underlies all the 10 Commandments 'and' the 10 Commandments are all about loving God (1-3) and neighbor (4-10). A commandment that does not love God and neighbor is not a commandment of God. And love that does not walk in the 10 Commandments, is not the love of God.]*

Finally, human love, as well as the love of Christians, do not save mankind. While there

are many church mission statements that highlight a church's mission to love God and neighbor, frankly stated, this love does not save. The love of mankind towards God and neighbor is a by-product of right faith – trust in God's love towards mankind. We must not forget that telling a pagan or Christian to love more is 'not' Gospel but Law. The good news of the Gospel is 'not' love God and love your neighbor. But instead, the Gospel is, "For God so loved you... that He gave..."

And so, the Christian church cannot rightly love until it has been loved by God first. And a Christian church not properly loving their neighbor is evidence that the old Adam has the upper hand and – perhaps – the church has abandoned or forgotten the love of God. Practically stated, if you want a loving church, you don't bark at parishioners to 'love more,' but you preach about the love of God in Christ so that they may receive and be centered in True Love. And, if the church is not loving, you do not bark at the church to love more to somehow offset a lack of love, but you call the church to repentance and then preach the love of God in Christ Jesus.

We must not forget that love is a 'fruit' of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22). When the Holy Spirit is at work in a Christian, He produces love. And what is amazing is that this love is *always* right in line with the 10 Commandments.

In closing, and as a contemporary side note, we hear much about the words 'love' and 'hate' in our culture. However, we *must* take special note that society's definitions of 'love and hate' are quite different from the Bible – especially John.

Biblical Love

Self-sacrifice for another person; serving in a manner consistent with God's Word

Societal Love

Tolerance and acceptance of another person's lifestyle, ideas, or attitudes.

Biblical Hate

Destructive against another person; persecuting them in a manner that is inconsistent with the Word of God

Societal Hate

Intolerant and disagreeable towards another person's lifestyle, ideas, or attitudes.



