

Week of December 9-15

WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

Scripture Reading: Read 1 John 4

In our previous devotional, we learned from the apostle John that one telltale sign that we are God's children is that we love one another. He repeats that assertion in today's chapter reading as well (4:7-8): *"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."* When we love others, we are showing the family resemblance to our Heavenly Father. Unfortunately, when we fail to love others, we also show the family resemblance, but to another father: the devil (2:11-12; cf. John 8:44).

God is love (4:8,16). It is his very character and nature to give of himself. His love was evidenced in its highest form, according to John, in the giving of Jesus (4:9-10): *"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."* By loving us like this, and filling us with his seed and Spirit, we are then empowered to love, as well, and follow his example (4:11): *"Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."* Indeed, it is only because he first loved us that we are able to love at all (4:19).

For John, then, not loving is never an option. Love is everything. Because the Father's character is love, it has to be the children's character as well. Indeed, as John makes clear at the end of today's chapter, *"If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen."* We can't have the vertical (loving God) if don't have the horizontal (loving others). They are interconnected and John knew it.

That love is so critical to the Christian faith is brought home by an ancient church tradition concerning the apostle John. Following the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans, John relocated to the city of Ephesus and exercised apostolic oversight over the church there and the churches throughout Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). After his exile to the island of Patmos where he wrote the book of Revelation, he returned to Ephesus where he lived out the remainder of his days. When he was advanced in years and unable to get to the church service under his own strength, he would be carried by his disciples. Once in the service, he was accustomed to saying over and over, "Little children, love one another." His disciples finally became so weary of hearing the same refrain that they asked him why he kept repeating himself. John is said to have replied, "It is the Lord's command. And if this be done, it is enough!" Given the fact that the major flaw of the Ephesian church, according to Jesus, was that they had lost their first love (Revelation 2:4-5), it makes sense that John would stress the need to love.

Action Step & Prayer Focus: Read 1 John 3:16-18, Matthew 5:44, and I Corinthians 13 to learn more about how and who we are to love. Pray for the Lord's love to flow through you and for any hindrances to loving others be removed from your life.

Take-a-way: *What's love got to do with it? Everything!*