

Love and the Abiding Life in 1st John

By Dan Krah

Introduction

This is His commandment: that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. The two dominant themes of 1st John are the command to love one another and to live the abiding life. We are going to be looking primarily at the relationship between the two.

Definitions

John uses the noun ἀγάπη 18 times, the verb ἀγαπάω 28 times, and refers to the recipients of the letter as ἀγαπητοὶ 6 times.

The noun is defined as the quality of warm regard for and interest in another, esteem, affection, regard, love without limitation to very intimate relationships. We understand the biblical use as having the characteristic of selflessness, as being dependent on the integrity of the one loving rather than the one loved. It is used of humans in Colossians 3:14, “Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity,” as well as Hebrews 10:24, “let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.” Of God toward Humanity in Romans 5:8, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us,” and Romans 8:38-39, “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Of the relationship between God the Father and Jesus in John 17:25-26, “O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it

known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”

The verb is defined as having a warm regard for and interest in another, cherish, have affection for, love. It is used of Humans in Romans 13:8, “Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled *the* law,” and in 1st Peter 1:22, “Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart.” Of Humans toward God in Romans 8:28, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose,” and in 1st Corinthians 8:3, “but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.” Of reciprocal love between God and Humans in John 14:21 and 23, “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him...If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.” Of God toward humans in the sacrificial death of Jesus in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me,” and in Ephesians 5:2, “and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.”

The adjective, ἀγαπητός, is defined as pertaining to one who is in a very special relationship with another, beloved. In Matthew 17:5, God the Father says, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!”

There is also the beautiful prayer of Polycarp in the Martyrdom of Polycarp chapter 14, “So they did not nail him, but bound him, and he put his hands behind him and was bound, as a noble ram out of a great flock, for an oblation, a whole burnt offering made ready and acceptable to God; and he

looked up to heaven and said: “ O Lord God Almighty, Father of Your beloved and blessed Child, Jesus Christ, through Whom we have received full knowledge of You, the God of Angels and powers, and of all creation, and of the whole family of the righteous, who live before You! I bless You, that You have granted me this day and hour, that I may share, among the number of the martyrs, in the cup of Your Christ, for the Resurrection to everlasting life, both of soul and body in the immortality of the Holy Spirit. And may I, today, be received among them before You, as a rich and acceptable sacrifice, as You, the God who lies not and is truth, have prepared beforehand, and shown forth, and fulfilled. For this reason I also praise You for all things, I bless You, I glorify You through the everlasting and heavenly high Priest, Jesus Christ, Your beloved child, through whom be glory to You with him and the Holy Spirit, both now and for the ages that are to come, Amen.” This, of course, is not scripture, but Greek usage in the early days of the church.

It is also used pertaining to one who is dearly loved, dear, beloved, prized, valued, as in 1st Corinthians 4:17, “For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.” ἀγαπητέ, the vocative of ἀγαπητος, dear friend, is used in 3rd John verse 2, “Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers,” verse 5, “Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially *when they are* strangers,” and verse 11, “Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God.” ἀγαπητοὶ ἡμῖν ἐγενήθητε, you have become dear to us, is used in 1st Thessalonians 2:8, “Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.” It is used of members of a Christian group in Romans 1:7, “to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called *as* saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Exegesis

In 1st John 3:23-24, we have the major themes of this letter. It is Love and the Abiding Life John wants his readers to understand. These two are inseparable. Zane Hodges writes in his commentary on 1st John, “God’s love is not perfected in a Christian whose heart is simply a reservoir in which to receive it, but only in one whose heart furnishes an aqueduct to convey it to others.”

The love of God through saints in Christ can only operate in the saint who is abiding in the love of God. 1st John 4:7 says, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.” What a distinction John gives us here, that being born of God and knowing God are two different things. We can identify our Position as born ones, τέκνια, children of God in chapter 2 and verse 12. We know that our sins are forgiven because of Jesus’ name. Yet in verse 13, the born ones have become παῖδια, growing children who have come to know the Father.

Just as there is a distinction between an acquaintance and an intimate friend, so there is a distinction between being a born again believer in Jesus Christ and having intimate fellowship with the Father and with His Son. Indeed, the Greek text here gives us a better understanding. John uses a perfect active indicative form of the verb γινώσκω of which the Holman Christian Standard Bible gives us the better rendering, “you have come to know the Father.”

John begins in chapter 2 and verse 3 to discuss this commandment that we have had from the beginning by stating that we have assurance that we have come to know Him: if we keep His commandments. The result of having developed an intimate relationship with God is that we not only keep His commands (which chapter 5 and verse 3 reveals are not burdensome), but because we love Him, we keep His word and desire to do the things that are pleasing in His sight.

In chapter 2 and verse 4 John writes, “The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” Anyone claiming to have intimate fellowship with God that does not keep His commands is lying and has not come to know God. The truth, the character and nature of God, the love of Jesus Christ proven to us on the Cross, the redemption through His blood and the fruit of the renewing of one’s mind are not evident in such a one. John writes in chapter 3 and verse 10, “This is how God’s children—and the Devil’s children—are made evident (the Greek adjective φανερός meaning to be evident so as to be readily known, visible, clear, plainly to be seen). When we are in intimate fellowship with God, we will live a life consistently shaped by His word which abides in us.

Now in verses 7 and 8 of chapter 2 we find a dichotomy, two ideas that seem to be opposed to each other. John says, “Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining. The idea here is that the command to love one another was always God’s command, even in the law.

When Jesus answered the question of which is the great commandment, he quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. “And He said to him, “‘YOU shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” Paul writes in Galatians 5:14, “For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ”

The contrast is revealed in the Greek word, πάλιν, to mean, from a certain point of view, this command is new. The command is new in Him, true in Him and true in you.

In John chapter 13 verses 34 and 35, Jesus says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” “Even as I have loved you”, He says, the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. Jesus Christ laid down His life for me, and He says to me and to you to love our brothers and sisters in the same way. I’d say that’s fairly profound.

In John chapter 15 verses 12 through 15, Jesus says, “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.”

The one who is a friend of Jesus, the one who has intimate fellowship with Him does what He commands, and He commands a greater love than the world knows or is capable of, to be revealed in us.

John lays it out for us in 1st John 3:16, “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” Paul agrees in Ephesians chapter 5 verses 1 through 2, “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.”

Finishing the teaching on the commandment, John writes in 1st John chapter 3 and verse 24, “The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him.”

Homily

The abiding life in the saint is designed to reflect the love of God in Christ. It is designed to move each one of us toward maturity, where we are perfected, matured, completed in love. John teaches us in chapter 4 and verses 16 and 17, that, “We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.” That phrase, “as He is,” has enough doctrine for a lifetime of teaching. He is light, love, He is seated at the right hand of the Father. Philippians 4:8 says, “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.” Why does Paul then say in verse 9, “The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things?” Because he practiced these things in abiding in Christ and these qualities, that are all descriptive of Jesus Christ, were reflected in his own character.

John goes on to say in verse 18 of chapter 4, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.” A saint matured in the love of God, a love that drives out fear, is a mature love. What is there to fear for a child of God perfected in His love? Men? What can man do to me? Powers and principalities? Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Now John says, “We love, because He first loved us.” He is the source of love that must flow through us to others and reciprocate back up to Him. How we walk in this present evil age should be a reflection of His love. The one claiming to abide in Christ is obligated to walk just as He walked. The one who is abiding in the light will love his brother. The one abiding in Him will

not sin and indeed the new man in you cannot sin. But the old man is still there, waging war with your mind and spirit. Abiding in Christ, in light, and in love, and the word, eternal life, and His anointing abiding in you which teaches you all things is the ground of victory in the Christian life. When John encourages the younger men in verse 14 of chapter 2, he says, “you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one”, it’s not just the positional victory in Christ he refers to. It is the experiential victory in this temporal life that we are called to, as well. That victory is still in Christ as you recognize your position in Christ and claim it constantly, abiding in Him, seated at the right hand of the majesty on high.

Paul exhorts us in Colossians chapter 3,

“Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, *and* abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—a *renewal* in which there is no *distinction between* Greek and Jew, circumcised and

uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

Conclusion

Therefore, God's chosen ones, holy and loved, put on heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, accepting one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a complaint against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive. Above all, put on love—the perfect bond of unity. And let the peace of the Christ, to which you were also called in one body, control your hearts. Be thankful. Let the message about the Messiah dwell richly among you, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, and singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

“Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.” – Jesus