

The Last Eyewitness, IX

Fleshing Out God (1 John 4:7-21)

December 7, 2003

SON OF THUNDER

- It would be easy to love people if they weren't so human!

This guy was on a deserted island for 25 years. The crew that rescued him noticed three huts and asked about them. He said, "That one's my home, and the other is my church." They said, "What about the third one?" He says, "Oh, that's the church I used to belong to!"

Did you know that John was an impulsive, hot-headed teenager when he served as a disciple? Jesus even gave him and his brother a funny knick-name:

To them he gave the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder. - Mark 3:17 NIV

That's not a flattering nick-name; "Come on Andrew, Simon, Matthew, Powder-keg ..."

But it was well deserved. John once flew off the handle when some Samaritans refused Jesus from their village. (Lk 9:52-53)

... they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village. - Luke 9:54-56 NIV

"Cool your jets Thunder-man; let's not vaporize anyone just yet!"

"Teacher," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us." "Do not stop him," Jesus said ... - Mark 9:49-50 NIV

"If someone's for us, they're not against us, Thunder-man."

... [Jesus] asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. - Mark 9:33-34 NIV

"Hey, Thunder-man; what'd I tell your mother about you and your brother ruling with Me in My Kingdom?" (Mat 20:20-27)

FIVE TRUTHS

As John walked with Jesus, he came to recognize five essentials about expressing genuine love; these simple truths transformed John from a hot-headed disciple into a tender-hearted Apostle.

#1: Genuine love results from experiencing God's love.

John came to comprehend how deeply he was loved by God and it created a (super) natural ability to love others.

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. – 1 John 4:7-8 NIV

Q: [Here's an interesting question] Are you worthy of God's love?

A: Yes ... you are.

We may not deserve forgiveness, and we can't earn salvation, but we were created in His image and as a result reflect eternally lovable qualities ... especially the capacity to love in return.

Q: Do you realize how profoundly precious you are to the Lord?

It's nothing you've done; it's simply why you were created. That's why John says; "Whoever does not love does not know God."

- I can only extend the love I have received.

When I embrace and internalize how intensely and overwhelmingly I'm loved, when that becomes an emotional reality, I am enabled to see what he sees in others and love them as I am loved.

#2: Genuine love makes an invisible God visible.

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. 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. – 1 John 4:9-12 NIV

John saw God's love "made complete" in Jesus and at some point realized he was seeing the God no one had ever seen.

He is the image of the invisible God ... – Colossians 1:15 NIV

God materializes when we love authentically and sacrificially. Notice John says: "Not that we loved God, but that he loved us." If I'm going to extend God's love, I must often choose to love even when I'm not loved first.

Q: Ever notice how after a heated argument it's difficult to be the first to apologize ... but it's fairly easy to reciprocate?

We're not being asked to create an emotion. We're being told we ought to make a choice and take an action. Genuine love can't help but express itself in practical conduct.

- I can make the Lord visible with my choices and actions.

The idea of a loving God was foreign to the Greeks and Romans of John's day. Their gods were angry, lustful, greedy, and vengeful.

Cronus (Saturn) protected his kingdom by eating all of his children except for Zeus (he was tricked by his wife). *Zeus* (Jupiter) overthrew his father and raped his sister, *Hera*. *Hera* (Juno) married Zeus and gave birth to an unloved son, *Ares*. *Ares* (Mars) was a cowardly murderer who committed adultery.

The head of the Greco Roman gods, Zeus (Jupiter) was also known as the god of thunder because he carried around lightning bolts and cast down fire from Heaven when he lost his temper.

Q: Sound like any hot-headed disciple you know?

We can choose to reveal the God who created us in His image ... or we can reflect the gods who were made in the image of man.

#3: Genuine love substantiates Jesus' residence.

We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he 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 him. - 1 John 4:13-16 NIV

As I observe myself loving the unlovable out of the resources of God's unconditional love, I know His Spirit is active within me. Some base spiritual maturity on knowledge or spiritual gifts; but the real test is in how we treat others.

The way we treat a waitress says far more than we wish it did about our understanding and experience of God's agape love!

- I can confirm His presence with the way I treat others

The way we feel and act toward others is a key indicator of how we believe (deep down) God feels and acts toward us.

#4: Genuine love prepares us for God's judgment.

In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us.
- 1 John 4:17-19 NIV

If we allow the Judge to adopt us and develop us (as evidenced by how we love) we'll naturally be ready to go before Him.

- I can be confident and fearless on the Day of Judgment.

Allowing God to love others through us builds our confidence in His character and our assurance of His affection for us.

#5: Genuine love accommodates no shades of grey.

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. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. - 1 John 4:20-21 NIV

This isn't a suggestion; it's a command. We blur the lines between the emotions of hate and love. We try to find an in-between zone where we can excuse resentment. But, John leaves no room for relative morality or partial-love.

Genuine love drives out hate, and the acid test of love is behavior. If I don't learn to love the people I have seen, I won't learn about the love of the God I haven't seen.

- I can not justify or excuse a lack of love in my life.

50 years earlier, John witnessed first hand how the love of God was fleshed out in the person of Christ.

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. - John 15:12 NIV

It wasn't Jesus' words, but His choices and actions that struck this son of thunder and transformed him into an Apostle of love.

- Each of us sons of thunder can be transformed.