

Love's Example

a sermon in the series
Life in the Son

A sermon delivered Sunday Morning, November 25, 2012
at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.
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1 John 4:19-21

We love Him because He first loved us. 20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? 21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

Andrew Murray, principle figure in the South African revival of 1860 said this,

"One of the great causes of why God cannot bless His church is a want of love."

Because of a lack of love in those days, Murray believed God could not bless the church mightily. I think the same is true today. It's interesting that he doesn't say 'for a lack of power He cannot bless the church,' for certainly there is a need of power today—the power of God. We need to see people saved and that requires God's power, but that's not the ailment Murray mentioned. It's neither a lack of power, nor a lack of joy, even though we were made to be able to joy in God. Yet that's not the great need Murray saw in his generation, nor is it the need I see in our generation. The reason I believe he singled it to love is because the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of love, is also the Spirit of power and joy. And when you love and are being loved by God, you will have power and joy.

I stand today a brother who has experienced the love of God, but I am love-starved in soul. I want more of the love of God flowing through me to others. I wish not my heart to be a heart of hoarding, because the more you try to hoard the love of God for yourself the less you experience. God loves you just because, but He also loves you that you might love others with the same measure of love you've been loved. I want us to see that this is His example and that we're to follow it.

I. THE EXAMPLE

"We love him because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

This is the pattern or blueprint we are to follow. I know us guys don't like too many blueprints. At Christmastime you get those boxes and it says, "Read instructions first! CAUTION!" in big letters, and what do we end up doing? Tossing them aside. And after we've got it all built and have

leftover pieces we don't know what to do with we yell, "Honey, have you seen the instructions?" God's love is an example we are to follow. He's given us a model and all we need to do is read and experience the instructions. We love Him because He first loved us.

There are two things I want to say about His example of love.

A. Timing

When did He love you? He loved you first. It's God's nature to give Himself away. There is not one ounce of selfishness in God, He keeps nothing to Himself and gives everything away. It's our Lord's nature to always be giving and He first loves. He first loved you and gave to you His only begotten Son that you would not perish but have everlasting life. This is the example for us. We are to love others before they love us. Jesus addressed this one time, He said, "What good is it if you love those who love you? Oh, the publicans and the sinner can do that. You have nothing to brag about." Oh no, God's kind of love takes the first step. It loves initially, before anyone loves in return.

He loved us when we didn't want to be loved by Him. The Bible says when we were enemies we were reconciled to God. He loved you when you didn't want Him to. Many of you may know the name Paul Tripp; we did a parenting conference using some of his DVDs. He recently told a story in a blog that I found very moving and telling about loving somebody that's not always lovable. The story is about their landlady and her daughter, who live next door to them in the duplex.

Before the event took place that he relayed in the blog, he said he thought they had a great relationship with both the landlady and her adult daughter. But for reasons they couldn't understand, the daughter got mad at them. She would yell and curse their children; she would play her stereo very loudly at night, waking the children. She did everything she could to purposefully make their lives miserable. They didn't understand what was happening, they tried to make things better but the more they tried the worse it got.

It all came to a head on the fourth of July. Months earlier the daughter had told the Tripp family they could borrow the extra refrigerator she had and was not using. Because it was the holiday, his wife's parents were in town and they went to the grocery store and bought extra food and, of course, stored it in the borrowed refrigerator. And on that hot, Friday afternoon, the call came from the landlady's daughter saying she wanted her refrigerator back. He asked why and explained it was full of food because of their company and she said, "That doesn't matter. I want that refrigerator back in my garage by 5 o'clock this afternoon."

Quietly angry and seething all afternoon, the pastor moped around the house trying to figure out what to do and why this was happening when he walked into the kitchen and found his wife baking cinnamon rolls. She said, "I want you to do something for me. Would you take a plate of these fresh hot cinnamon rolls over to our landlady's daughter next door and give them to her? But wait, one more thing, I want you to write down a note telling her how much we care for her and how much we're committed to having a good relationship with her."

Wives always seem to know what to say or do, don't they? They can just say something and you

want to go the opposite direction. Well, pastors are no different. Paul couldn't believe she was making this request, but submitted anyway. About 45 minutes later he found himself knocking at the landlady's front door and the landlady came to the door. He explained what the cinnamon rolls were for and gave them to her and the landlady said to him that he must be some kind of nut to do this after what her daughter had done to him. She couldn't even understand it under all the evil they had faced.

For months they kept their commitment to do everything they could to love this woman and show her in initiative and actions love and nothing changed. But one spring afternoon, many months had transpired and there was a knock at the door. Paul could see through the peephole it was the landlady's daughter and he thought, "Oh no, what's going to happen now?" He answered the door and she began to weep. This is what she said,

"You both know that for months I've been a very angry person. It hasn't been directed just at you. I've been angry with everyone in my life. I've destroyed all of my relationships. I've alienated everyone in my life. The only two people in the world who I am sure love me are you and your wife. I'm here to ask for your forgiveness and to ask for your help. I want what's enabled you to respond to me as you have."

Beloved, that is a demonstration of God's love and that is our example. He first loves and He loves those who don't want His love. That's the way we are to love.

B. Humility

Do you realize the humility on God's part to love us? It takes humility to love one another, especially when someone isn't always lovable. You have to swallow your pride and humble yourself to love that person. We're not all that different; we're basically on equal footing. You don't have to stoop too far to love somebody else. But God is infinitely above us and He has no problems loving us. For God to stoop and humble Himself to love you and me is an incredible thought all in its own, and He's so humble He doesn't even consider it stooping when He loves us. He doesn't consider it beneath His dignity or character, that's how humble God is.

To love as Christ loves you've got to first have the humility of Jesus Christ.

Humility = to take no pride in any of your virtues, goodness or righteousness, so much so that if your virtue is criticized you're not offended in the least because you don't even take pride in your strong points; you understand that all you are is bankrupt before God and without His mercy you have nothing.

Perhaps the greatest President of the United States was Abraham Lincoln. Not only is he known for his strategies and keeping the Union together in one of the most difficult hours of our nation's history, but he was also known for his humility. At the conclusion of the war he went to Richmond, Virginia to the home of the confederate president, Jefferson Davis. He knocked at the door but Jefferson had already fled Richmond. His wife and new baby came answering at the door and the baby reached out to Lincoln. Of course, Mrs. Davis was surprised to see the President, Abraham Lincoln, at her door and he reached out and took the baby from her arms and

cuddled it. The baby gave Lincoln's homely face a big kiss. The president returned the baby and said to Mrs. Davis, "Tell your husband that for that kiss I forgive him everything."

The war was not going well and Lincoln went to the home of General McClellan in order to ask him to take over the army of the Potomac. The general wasn't there and they waited about 30 minutes in the drawing room. Finally he arrived and went right upstairs—He didn't like Lincoln, in fact he would end up running against Lincoln for his second term in 1864, he lost of course and Lincoln was re-elected—they waited 20-30 minutes and finally the butler went upstairs and said, "The President is waiting to talk to you."

"I don't want to talk to him." And he went to bed with the President of the United States in his drawing room.

The butler came down and sheepishly said the General was indisposed. The very next day Lincoln went back to the man's house to once again wait upon him to ask him to take over the Potomac Army. One of the men with Lincoln said, "Sir, why are you doing this? How you can put up with this ill-mannered boar?"

Lincoln said, "Why, I would hold Mr. McClellan's horse if he could only give me a victory."

That's humility. Not to think too highly of yourself, but being willing to serve. If we are to love like God, we have to be humble like God.

II. FAILURE TO FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE

Our failure to follow the example doesn't need much elaboration, does it? We don't always follow the example of the Lord. But first I want you to look at verse 21 and see that it is a command to follow God's example of love.

A. The Command to Follow God's Example

*"And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also."
(1 John 4:21)*

In the New King James Version the word *must* is italicized, which means the translators—to help give meaning and understanding—added the word *must* to bring clarification. I've told you that when a word is italicized or bracketed in your Bible that means in the original language, whether it be Hebrew or Greek, whatever you're reading, that word is not there. However, in this case the word is there. How can a word not be there and there at the same time? Well, in the Greek language for a word to be there it didn't always have to appear in the print because the way they spelled the ending of words would often imply other words that weren't visibly written.

In the case of the word *love* here, it's spelled with a subjective ending, which means, if you were reading the Greek, you would know that the action could or could not take place. In other words, you may or may not love your brother, but since this is a command to love our fellow Christians,

the translators put the word *must* in there in order to show subjective possibility.

It's saying you should love them but you may not love them, so God says, "I'm going to say this as a command." In fact, some of your translations may even use the word *should*. "*The one who loves God should love his brother.*"

The bottom line in this little Greek grammar lesson is this—this is a command, which means one thing. You may or may not do it. It means just because you are a Christian does not mean you will love your brother or your sister. It means you have to choose to love. It's not automatic. I don't mean to be disrespectful, but getting saved doesn't automatically make you love people. You still have to choose to love. In this case, love is a decision, an action. So when John says you must love your brother, he isn't talking about shaking hands at church and saying, "I love you!" He's talking about doing something in love toward a brother or sister.

This is where it gets hairy and frightening. To not put forth the action to love a brother or sister is not neutrality—meaning you don't hate the person, you don't really know them, you're just kind of ambivalent, you're neutral—John says there is no neutrality here. Either you love them in action or you don't and if you don't, John says it's hate. That's the forcefulness here of this command. You say you don't hate him or her because you don't feel anything negative about them, you just don't feel anything. John says that's not Christian love, that's hate and it will not survive the love test. You choose not to love them and therefore, in the sight of God, to choose not to love that brother or sister is a choice to hate them.

What does that mean for us? Listen Oak Grove, this is what it means: When you covenant yourself to this church in church membership it's not just so you can vote, it's not just because you can now really feel like you're a part. What it means is that when there is a need in this church—even from somebody that you don't know—you find out how you can demonstrate love to that person. That's what it means. We've heard of some needs today. Now that you know those needs God expects something of you as a part of this body. What does He expect? One thing—you to love them in action. That might mean just praying for them, it might mean you send them a text or make a phone call or stopping by. It might mean cooking dinner or preparing something, working in their yard for them. It may mean going into your clothes closet and bringing out some clothes, it may mean going to the cupboard or refrigerator and packing some groceries in a sack or baking a pie. It might just mean to spend some time with them and invite them over for dinner or take them out to lunch. I don't know. But I do know this—it's more than a feeling in the heart of affection, it's an action.

B. Reasons for the Failure (Five)

Let me give you some reasons why we fail in this regard. Not to make you feel guilty, because I learned a long time ago guilt is poor motivation. Pastors give congregations guilt all the time and that only works for so long. Let me give you five reasons why I think we fail in following our Lord's example of loving other's first, even when they're not lovable. What keeps us from demonstrating our love to one another?

1. The American Culture

There are a lot of good things about our culture. I'm thankful to be an American and live in this society. There is a lot of positive things about our culture, but not all culture is good. There is some bad.

A. Busyness

Quiet time is even hard to find. If you live the American life you are going to be a busy person. It takes time to cultivate relationships and friendships. It takes time to love somebody because to love someone means you have to invest in them and that requires time.

2. We wait for People to Love Us

We wait for them to make the first move. Once they do we're good to follow up. If somebody asks you over for dinner, what's your next response? "Now we want to have you over." That's usually it, isn't it? Once you've been invited you feel obligated to return the favor. But why do we wait for somebody else to be friendly?

Now, certainly the Proverb was true, I wouldn't ever dare argue with the Bible, "*You want to have friends? Show yourself to be friendly.*" If you want a relationship, be outgoing, extend your arm of love and fellowship. But I recognize in a group even this size that is like asking some people to walk a tightrope over Niagara. They would rather try that than try to reach out the people. They're so intimidated, so introverted, so self-conscious. So, because of that we often don't take the initiative. Please recognize that about yourself and ask God to help you and He will.

3. We feel Inadequate

We just don't feel we can give ourselves to the degree we need to in order to love other people, especially when somebody is going through a difficulty. When somebody is really going through a hardship, the tendency is to shy away because we don't know what to say or do. Have you been there? Somebody has been diagnosed with a problem and what do we want to do? We want to reach out to them but we're afraid to pick up that phone because we don't know what we're going to say when they answer. We feel so inadequate to love.

4. A Fear of Rejection

We're afraid if we reach out and take that first step they will not take the second and there we will be standing rejected. We don't reach out because we're afraid somebody will not like us. Perhaps somebody in the past has rejected your love. It might have been a mom or a dad, somebody very significant to you and you still carry that scar in your heart today and it affects almost everything you do. You've discovered the safest thing for you to do is to crawl into your cocoon and not reach out, and therefore you do not follow God's example.

5. Selfishness.

This is the granddaddy of them all. The foundation of them all. At the heart of all sin is selfishness. You will always find it. For example, when Adam sinned in the garden the Bible says Adam was not deceived, the woman was. Do you know why he took of that fruit and ate? Because he loved the woman God had given him so much he was willing to follow her even in rejecting God. But the moment he sinned you know what he did? He said, "It's her fault." He accuses her, the very woman he was willing to follow instead of God, of having led him astray. When love for God is gone, love for your fellow man is gone. Selfish tendencies make you unwilling to take the time or the effort or cost to love others.

III. HOW TO FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE

The example itself gives us the power to do it. In other words, God loving you is the power to help you love others. We love Him because He first loved us. It was the love of God that did something in your heart to love Him and it's the love of God in you that will help you love your brothers and sisters. Love conquers selfishness—it's the only thing that will. It's not you making a commitment at the altar today and say, *I'm going to be a better Christian, better husband, better wife, better parent, better child*, no, the only power that can overcome our self-centered tendencies is the love of God in you experienced, felt, lived.

Nothing but love can expel selfishness. So, again, what I said a few weeks ago is the answer. I may repeat myself but at least I'm consistent. The only answer here in order to love like this is to keep yourself in the love of God. That's what Jude 21 says, "*Keep yourselves in the love of God.*"

2 Thessalonians 3:5,

"May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God."

Why would Paul and Jude say these things to Christians who already experienced the love of God and are being loved by God all the time? Because they know it's not having been loved by God in the past, when you're saved, that's the answer. It's to have the experience of His love today that will motivate and empower you to love others today.

Listen, watch this, if you experience afresh and anew the love of God then you can think to yourself and say, *I know I'm busy, but how busy was Jesus that He would take His time to die for me? Or you can think about the love of God for you, how He's ministered to you love when you didn't deserve it and you can think, If God can do this for me, I don't need to wait for somebody to love me, I'll reach out to others because that's exactly what Christ has done for me.* I may feel awful inadequate to love you, and I often do, but when I think of what God's love is and how He's loved me I am willing to take that chance because I don't fear rejection now. Even if you do reject me, I've got one who will never turn His back on me! The love of God answers every one of these objections and hindrances to not love and it's the only thing that will get us through.

There are some in this room today, I know it, you still struggle in this department believing God

loves you. Some of you are the very opposite. You're very confident in the love of God. But when was the last time you experienced it? Just because you are persuaded that God loves you isn't the answer. I'm asking when you experienced His love last? When was the last time God manifested Himself in a way that it was just like God was wrapping His arms around you and drawing you close and saying, *"I love you."* Kissing your cheek? When is the last time you experienced that? Jude says keep yourself in that. Keep reminding and preaching to yourself that God truly does love you and there is nothing between you and Him. He does have you in His heart.

What we often do is deny the Word of God because of circumstances we're going through. We look at the circumstances of pain, difficulty and adversity and say, *Hey, God surely can't be loving me right now,* and because you reject the Word of God, you don't have the wherewithal to confront that thing and know that in itself is the love of God for you. Do you understand what I'm saying?

The pain God brings into your life is not because He is some insane mad scientist who loves to torture His subjects. The pain He brings into our lives is because there is something in my life that only pain can address so He can remove it from my life. Every time I've gone through difficulty I'm learning to pray, *"Lord, what is in my heart that is still so unlike Jesus that you've introduced this pain to expose that part of my life?"* The way you respond to your circumstances will tell you what's in your heart that He still wants to eradicate. It's a loving thing God is doing to you, not hateful.

Quit believing what you're seeing and feeling and begin to believe truth. Direct your heart into the love of God and keep yourself there. Keep telling and preaching and asking God to help you to believe that He loves you dearly and begin to learn to see it in your life. Begin looking for ways God loves you in your every day life.

Let me give you an example. A week ago Thursday I went to get my haircut and I sat in my barber's chair and the first question he normally asks me is, "Michael, how'd this haircut do you?" For me, and my hairstyle, I try to answer the best I can, which is usually, "Bob, it was really good, thank you. I really appreciate it." But instead of asking me that he said, "Michael, a few days ago were you in trouble?" I thought that was an odd question. "Bob, I don't think I was in trouble. What day was it?"

"I can't remember, but it was just this week and just a few days ago. I got up that morning and I had this terrible sense that I had to pray for you."

When he said that I knew. Just a few days prior I was going through terrible discouragement and was fighting just to fight. I was discouraged and my heart was troubled. He could never tell me what day it was, but I knew what day it was because about midmorning that day God allowed the sun to shine again.

I sat there with tears filling up my eyes as he began to cut my hair because I knew that was God loving me on a day I felt so unloved by God. A day when I didn't think God was anywhere. I knew intellectually He was near me, but I sure wasn't feeling it. I felt all alone and that my world was upside down and the world was going to win this time. I'd fought the battle hundreds of times and God had brought me through, but I'm telling you, I felt like, "This battle, God, how many more times can I endure this?" And all along God was loving me by putting it on a brother's heart to

pray for me.

Begin to look for the love of God in your life and you'll find it, even in the small things.

B. You Love God by Loving Your Brother

"If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" (1 John 4:21)

Verse 20 is a bridge between verse 19 and 21. Do you hear what John is telling us? He says it is an impossibility to love God and not love your brother. It's just not logic he's using here, meaning you can't see God but you say you love Him, you can see your brother and you're not really loving him, so something is not right. That's true, but that's not the significance here. What he's really trying to say is if you truly love God whom you can't see, you will be able to love the brother whom you can see. How's that? Because the way you love God whom you can see is by loving the brother whom you can. Did you get that? For me to love God I need to love Marilyn whom I can see. And when I love Marilyn in the way the Bible dictates, I'm loving my Father. I'm to love Greg as a brother. I'm to have his back and to pray for him and when I'm doing that I am loving my father. I can't see my Father, I can't go text God, I can't pick up the phone or run over next door and find Him at home, but I can find Him in my brothers and sisters and when I love you I am loving God whom I cannot see. That's what John is trying to tell you.

I know many of you are going through difficulty; I'm going through some myself. But my Bible says when God gets ready to use somebody He usually first wounds them. I can take you through Bible history and show you that time and time again. What's He do with Moses before He uses him? He puts him on the backside of the desert for 40 years. What's He do when He takes a shepherd boy out of the sheepfold? He puts him down in the valley to fight a giant and crowns him king and the next 13-20 years he spends in caves hunted down like a fugitive. What's He do with a Peter who preaches that magnificent sermon on the day of Pentecost? What's He do with him before He uses him like that? Jesus tells him, "Peter, you're going to deny Me three times and when you're converted, strengthen your brother." And the moment the cock crowed that third time Jesus looked at him and the Bible says Peter went out and wept bitterly. He had to be broken, crushed before God could use him. He was so full of himself he thought he could do anything Jesus could do. Why, he even tried to walk on water like Jesus.

Friends, I know some of us are going through some high waters right now, but let me tell you that's not because God has rejected you, it's because He's chosen to use you. He wants to use you and He will use you and you need to understand that sometimes His love wounds deeply because that's the way to wholeness.

If I'm going to pick up a cup to pour water in it, I want a whole and unbroken cup. If you get a crack in a cup it's going to leak and won't hold your water. God has made us vessels of His love and there is no way, my dear friends, that God can use us to touch this sick and hurting, unlovable and love-starved world until our hearts are whole so we can contain His love. When we can contain it, then He'll pour us out on them.

That's the example. He first loves. He loves those who don't want to be loved. If you and I will follow that example and follow Him, we will touch many people for His glory and not only will this church be changed, but this area also. It will be changed because there is nothing more powerful than the love of God. Let it not be said of this church that we could not receive the blessings of God because of a want of love. Amen.