Excerpts from Life-Study of 1 John, Message 34
THE VIRTUES OF THE DIVINE BIRTH TO PRACTICE THE DIVINE LOVE

Bible Verses:

1 John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God, and everyone who loves has been begotten of God and knows God.

10 Herein is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son as a propitiation for our sins.

First John 4:1-6 is a parenthetical section in which the believers are warned to discern the spirits. This means that 4:7 is the direct continuation of 3:24. First John 4:7-21 is an

extension of the section from 2:28 through 3:24, stressing further the brotherly love, already covered in 3:10-24, as a higher condition of the life that abides in the Lord.

GOD—THE SOURCE OF LOVE

In 4:7 John says, "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God, and everyone who loves has been begotten of God and knows God." Here John says that love is of God. This indicates that when we love others, our love must be something that comes out of God. Our love for the brothers should not be something of ourselves; it should be the love that is of God. The believers, who have been begotten of God and know God, love one another habitually with the love that is of God and is the expression of God.

The Divine Birth as the Basic Factor of Brotherly Love

In verse 7 John says that everyone who loves has been begotten of God. The apostle's emphasis here is still the divine birth, through which the

divine life has been imparted into the believers, the life that affords them the life ability to know God. This divine birth is the basic factor of brotherly love, which is a higher condition of the life that abides in the Lord. We have seen that John's writings emphasize the divine birth (3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18; John 1:12-13), which is our regeneration (3:3, 5). Through the divine birth we have received the divine life, which is the eternal life (1 John 1:2), as the divine seed sown into our being (3:9). Out of this seed all the riches of the divine life grow from within us. It is by this that we abide in the Triune God and live the divine life in our human living. The divine birth, therefore, is the basis of our Christian life.

Knowing God by the Divine Life

According to John's word in 4:7, everyone who loves not only has been begotten of God but also knows God. This knowing is by the divine life (John 17:3) received from the divine birth. The word knows here also implies experience and

enjoyment. We cannot know God without experiencing and enjoying Him. This indicates that this knowing is an experiential knowing, not an objective knowledge of God. We know God because we have experienced Him and are enjoying Him.

KNOWING GOD AS LOVE

First John 4:8 goes on to say, "He who does not love has not known God, because God is love." Not to know God means not to experience Him or enjoy Him. If you have experienced and enjoyed God, who is love, surely love will come forth from you.

He who has not known God does not have the knowing ability of the divine life received from the divine birth. Such a one, who has not been begotten of God and does not have God as his life, does not love with God as his love, since he does not know God as love.

THE LOVE OF GOD MANIFESTED TO US

In 4:9 John goes on to say, "In this the love of God was manifested among us, that God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might have life and live through Him." In this verse we see God's intention and goal in sending the Son: God sent the Son so that we might have life and live through Him. Living through the Son implies having the divine life. If we did not have life through Him, we could not live through Him. Therefore, living through the Son implies that we have received Him as our life. God sent His Son, and we have received Him as life. Now we live through Him.

In 1 John 4:9 we see that God sent His Son in order that we might have life and live through Him. In 4:10 we see that God sent His Son as a propitiation for our sins. If we consider these verses together, we will see that God's sending His Son as a propitiation for our sins is not the goal. Rather, this is a procedure for arriving at the goal, and the goal is that we may have life and live through the Son. Therefore, God sent His Son as

a propitiation for us with the intention that through His Son we may have life and live.

LOVING ONE ANOTHER AND MANIFESTING GOD

In 4:11 John continues, "Beloved, if God has loved us in this way, we also ought to love one another." This is to love with the love of God as He loved us.

First John 4:12 says, "No one has beheld God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us." The word beheld indicates that if we love one another with the love of God, as He loved us, we express Him in His essence, so that others can behold in us what He is essentially.

No one has beheld God, that is, seen God. But if we love one another with God as love, we will manifest God. Because God is manifested in our love for one another, others will be able to see God in this love.

GOD'S LOVE PERFECTED IN US

In verse 12 John also speaks of God's love being perfected in us. The love of God is perfected already in God Himself, but now this love needs to be perfected in us. This requires that the love of God become our experience. If the love of God remains in God, it will be perfected in God Himself. But when this love becomes our experience and enjoyment, it will be perfected in us. The love that is already perfected in God needs to be perfected in us through our enjoyment of this love.

KNOWING THAT WE ABIDE IN HIM AND HE IN US

In 4:13 John says, "In this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, that He has given to us of His Spirit." The words in this mean in the fact that God has given to us of His Spirit, we know that we abide in Him and He in us. The Spirit, whom God has given to dwell in us (James 4:5; Rom. 8:9, 11), is the witness in our spirit (v. 16), witnessing that we dwell in God and God in us.

The abiding Spirit, that is, the indwelling Spirit, is the element and sphere of the mutual abiding, the mutual indwelling, of us and God. By Him we are assured that we and God are one, that we abide in each other, indwelling each other mutually. This is evidenced by our living, a living that habitually expresses His love.

GOD'S LOVE BECOMING OUR CONSTITUTION

As we consider 1 John 4:11-13, we see that we should never teach the saints to love with their own natural love, with the love that is something apart from God Himself. On the contrary, we all need to see that God abides in us, and we abide in Him. This is a matter of coinherence, of mingling, of organic union. God is not only in us; He abides in us, dwells in us. Through this mingling, this organic union, He becomes us, and we become Him. Therefore, since God is love, this love becomes our constitution. Because we become what He is, our love for others will actually be God Himself.

We love others with God as love. Because God abides in us and we abide in Him, we love with God Himself as love.

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Note: This version is not intended to be printed as material for pursuit during the small group gathering. Instead, it is to be used as additional reference for brothers and sisters who want to prepare in advance for fellowship on the message. We include here notes from the commentaries of the brothers in the life-study radio program. The points from these commentaries can help enrich our understanding and, eventually, our fellowship with the saints on the selected portions of the life-study message. We still recommend that, if possible, the saints still listen to the audio message in addition to reading the life-study message for personal pursuit and for preparation for small group gatherings. We also wish to point out that these notes have not been fully polished.

[Commentary]:

Introduction

[CW]: In his first epistle, the Apostle John talks very much about love. Chapter four particularly places a strong emphasis on love. But if we examine John's presentation of this most visible virtue of the divine birth, we realize that the love spoken of in this book is not a vague or general love, nor is it a natural love, a love that finds its source in the human heart. It is the love that flows from the divine source, from God Himself. In 4:8, John puts it this way, he who does not love has not known God because God is love. Ron Kangas is here for this, I hope, delightful fellowship. It strikes me that way, Ron, as I look at this portion.

[RK]: I expect it will be delightful because it's in God who is love. I appreciated one of the main points in your opening fellowship. I'd like to underscore this for our listeners, and that concerns what love is, what kind of love we're talking about, because as soon as you hear the word love, you may go into gear like, yeah, I mean, I don't understand a lot of deep theological things, but I know what love is, and we all should love one another, and there isn't enough love around. Well, remember Brother Chris's fellowship, that what John is talking about is not natural human love, the love that we have in virtue of the fact we were created in God's image and have a human life. Simply put, we're talking about a love which is God Himself.

John says love is of God. That points to the source, but then he says, and he says it twice, God is love. Notice he doesn't say love is God. He says God is love. So love in 1 John is intrinsically related to God in His essence, nature, and being. So this is the kind of love, the love which is of God, and the love which is God because God is love. That's what we're talking about, and that's what makes this so sweet and so pleasant. But in order to really experience this, we need to discern between love and love, by which I mean we need to discern between the natural human love, which is devoid of God, and the love infused into us by the Triune God, the love which is God Himself. It's an immense difference. How immense? The difference between life and death. Whatever is in our natural life eventually will result in death, even our love, or especially our love. But what is of God is of eternal life. It is incorruptible, indestructible. It is resurrection life, and the love of God is intrinsically related to the life of God.

So God is love. God is life. When we have Him as life, we have Him as love. When we have Him as love, we have Him as life. The crucial thing is to have Him, in particular, to have Him, God, the Triune God, as that special love which is of God and which actually is Him.

[CW]: Beloved, let us love one another, John says in 4:7, because love is of God, and everyone who loves has been begotten of God and knows God. And I want to draw particular attention to this last short phrase, and knows God. That'll be a topic that we hear about in the section just ahead. Let's join Witness Lee.

Part 1

[CW]: Ron, I'd like to come back to the point he seemed to be centered on initially, and that is the connection between our knowing and experiencing God and our apprehension of the divine love. It seems like Christians spend a lot of time seeking to be loving and expressing love, but may neglect this other portion, and it's always a disappointment, isn't it, when we try it that way?

[RK]: It is, and it should be a disappointment, because it's something of ourselves. It's not something of the Lord. Let's look at 4:7. Again, John exhorts us to love one another. That's not where the verse ends. If it ended there, it really would be little more, actually nothing more, than an ethical admonition, something preachers are prone to do on a weekly basis. Love, why don't you love, please love, love one another. John goes on to say, love is of God. This love has its source in God. But what's particularly vital for our fellowship in this segment is John's word through the effect that everyone who loves has been begotten of God and knows God.

Notice John inserts “has been begotten of God.” This refers explicitly and clearly to the divine birth, that is to our regeneration. We actually have been begotten, born of God. He is actually our Father. Because we have been begotten of God, we have the life of God. That's what happens when you're begotten. You have the life from your origin, your source. So now we need to connect this begetting by God, which brings in the divine life, with loving. Everyone who loves is someone who has been begotten of God and thus possesses the life of God. This indicates that the life of God is the basis, the foundation in our being for our loving. We can love because we have been begotten of God and now have the life of God. The love of God and the life of God are, of course, one reality in God's being.

In our experience of the Lord, everything depends on life. All the attributes, all the virtues are in God's life. We have a hymn to that effect in our hymnal. Hymn 602. The hymn says, in this life are all His riches. So we have been begotten of God. We have the life of God with the riches of God, including love. Now we are able to love. Furthermore, we know God. And in this context, knowing God is an experiential matter. It's a matter related to our experience and enjoyment of the Lord as life and as love. This is not a doctrinal knowing. That is about God. It's not a theological knowledge concerning God. It is knowing God directly and personally through our experience of Him as life, the life which contains His love.

So now we see that to love one another is predicated upon realizing that love has its source in God, that we have been begotten of God to have the life of God as the base for the love of God, and also on the fact that we know God experientially by means of His life. The life of God operating in us has the function of knowing God. A lot of truth and a wealth of experience are packed into these simple words. Let us love one another because love is of God and everyone who loves has been begotten of God and knows God. Wonderful.

[CW]: Wonderful. Ron, this whole segment, chapter four, we're kind of marching through today from 7-15, where love is an emphasis. But as you just pointed out in your speaking, and as we're hearing, I think, again and again from Witness Lee today, the context links these two things, the matter of the experience of the divine life and the expression of God as love out of the living of the believer. This is the whole context. It's not just, as you said, an admonition to love, but it's altogether entwined with this matter of the divine life operating in us, producing the divine love as an outflow. And I think when we go into this next portion, we'll see it very clearly. Verses 9-10, I think, really underscore this. In this the love of God was manifested among us, that God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might have life and live through Him. Herein is love, not that we have loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as a propitiation for our sins. This is a marvelous point just ahead.

Here's Witness Lee again.

Part 2

[CW]: Ron, verse 9 says that God sent His Son that we might have life and live through Him. Verse 10 says that God sent His Son that we might have propitiation concerning sins. One procedural, one the goal. And the ultimate outcome is this marvelous organic union. The sequence is important, isn't it?

[RK]: The sequence is important and the goal of the issue is marvelous. First and basic problem as fallen human beings is sin and sins. This places us under God's righteous judgment and in a situation requiring propitiation and action to make the offended party happy. So in His love, God sent His only begotten Son as a propitiation for our sins. So this deals with the problem of sin and sins, but it deals with it as a procedure which is judicial according to the law of God. But we have another problem that's the issue of the former and that is death. And death by its very nature is opposed to life. So we see that God sent His only begotten Son that we may have life and live through Him. The Son we know from 1 John 5:11 and 12 is the embodiment of the divine life, the expression of the divine life. God sent His Son into the world that by believing into Him and receiving Him into us, we would be born of God and have life. And this is the eternal life.

So based upon the propitiation, we now have the divine birth, which brings in the divine life. In this divine life, we have what we call an organic union with God, a union in life. We are in Him and He is in us. So verse 13 says, in this we know, this is an experiential knowing again, that He abides in us and we abide in Him. This is mutual indwelling. And the particular term we use to describe this is co-inhering. We dwell in God, God dwells in us. This also points to mingling in which God and man are mingled together without producing something which is a third thing in between. The point is that there's a union with mingling and co-inhering. And then experientially, God becomes us and we become Him.

God becomes us by becoming the constitution of our being. And we become God, of course, not in the sense of the Godhead. We would never teach such a blasphemous, heretical notion, but we become Him in the sense of being the same as He is in life and nature. And the nature includes the love. So God is love. He is wrought into us. He abides in us. He works Himself into us to make Himself us. And then we abide in Him and we become Him. This is a deep union in life and in nature that does not jeopardize the Godhead. Now, because we are the same as God in nature, and the essence of God's nature is love, we are love in constitution. Because we are love, we love. And this love is the expression of God and hence is the manifestation of God as love. Isn't this good news?

[CW]: This is the good news. I'd like to close on that point. If we jump to verse 15, John says, “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God.” Now, let me stop here because I think our own thought or the most frequently heard conclusion to that sentence in the context of presenting Christ, presenting the gospel, the normal logical conclusion would be whoever confesses Jesus is the Son of God is forgiven of their sins. And though we celebrate this and we praise the Lord for this, John completes it this way. Whoever confesses Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God. This could have the effect of revolutionizing even our gospel preaching, couldn't it, Ron?

[RK]: It can and we hope it will.

[CW]: Well, God is love and the expression of that love is the expression of God Himself. I think we have had a good fellowship today to more clearly draw the distinction between the kind of love that the Bible

presents and the kind of love that is just mere human sentiment and which always falls short. The distinction is, I think, even sharper now, isn't it, Ron?

[RK]: Much sharper. A further comment on verse 15. We end up abiding in God and God is love and love is of God. And the God who is the source of love, the God who is love abides in us. This is the key based upon propitiation to deal with sins and based upon the divine birth, which swallows death and brings in the divine life. We have an organic union with the Lord. Now in this union, we abide in Him. He is love. He who is love abides in us because of this marvelous spiritual reality. We love. John, knowing this, based his appeal to love, not on ethics, not on self-effort, not on striving to improve. He based it all on the vision, on the experience, on his knowing that by confessing that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in us and we abide in God. Because of this, it's so normal for believers to love one another with a love which is God Himself.

[CW]: Well, we are out of time. A big topic. God is love and how that is expressed and apprehended and manifested in the believers.