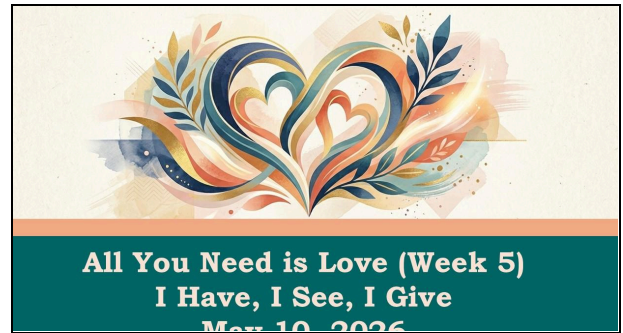


All You Need Is Love (Week 5) - I Have, I See, I Give
Yesterday's Sermon Summary



1. So why spend six Sundays on Christian love? A less obvious answer might be its ripple effect in our lives. According to St. Augustine (300s CE), centering on Christian love causes all manner of good consequences: a) it ensures that we're reading and interpreting the Bible correctly, b) it carries us along and gives our lives direction and purpose, and c) in his words, "If love grows in you, then so beauty grows, for love is the beauty of the soul."

2. We focused on [1st John 3.16-19](#) yesterday. First, on verse 18, which reads, "Little children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth." The key words are the contrasting pairs: "word and speech" is the equivalent of "empty words on our tongues" whereas "deeds" infers something that is active and takes work and/or effort. To love in an active way that takes work is to love in a way that's true, that is, it's real, authentic, and sincere.

3. So what we see in 1st John 3.18 is that there are two possible expressions or kinds of Christian love. The first is shallow, hollow, and superficial, fleeting like smoke in the wind. Similar to a famous turn of phrase by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the well-known German pastor in the 20th-century, this kind of love is "cheap love" (as opposed to Bonhoeffer's "cheap grace"). Clinical psychologist Randi Gunther calls this "touch and go love": it's marked by an avoidance of serious conversation, a lack of emotional engagement and fulfillment, an on and off again cycle (or "out of sight, out of mind"), an inattention to actual personal needs, and connection only when it's convenient.

4. But instead of this kind of empty, unfulfilling love, verse 18 extols a more substantive, sure kind of love that is what St. Thomas à Kempis called "a labor of love." One of the great psychological studies of love is from 1956, written by Erich Fromm entitled *The Art of Loving*, and describes love as follows: "Love requires discipline, concentration, patience, and faith...It is not a feeling but a practice." Twenty two years later, M. Scott Peck writes in his famous book *The Road Less Traveled*. "Love is not effortless. To the contrary, love is effortful. It is an act of the will - namely, both an intention and an action. We do not have to love. We choose to love." In those two citations we can get a sense of who really loves us in our own lives, and how well we're really trying to love others around us.

5. Let's back up one verse - translated a little more literally and with some attention to its original language (ancient Greek), [1st John 3.17](#) reads, "How does God's love remain in anyone who has a normal, everyday life like everyone else's in the world, sees a brother or sister who lacks, and yet closes their heart to them?"

6. Peter Rhea Jones, a professor at McAfee School of Theology in Atlanta, says that in this verse we see two ways to come at life, one of which is loving, and one of which is not. First, we can believe that we don't have or don't have enough, and move through life not seeing the needs around us, and then choose to not give or open our heart to others. Or, second, we can assess what we have to give, choose to go through with open eyes and hearts, and then give from the heart to those who need that we see.

7. Remember that most of the recipients of the letter we call 1st John were dirt poor, many were slaves and women without legal standing or many material goods. Yet to them the writer says unabashedly, "You have and you can give." What do all people have, regardless of socioeconomic class, education, or zip code? We all have life experiences to share, good or bad, we all have skills and aptitudes that others do not, we all have time and attention to give, and we all can care.

8. Also, we can all choose to live in a way and at a pace that allows us to see - really see - the physical, relational, emotional, communal, and spiritual needs of those we encounter. Soren Kierkegaard, the well-known Danish Christian philosopher from the 1800s says in his Works of Love, "Our Christian duty is to love those we see...And when we love, we change into an answer to our neighbor's needs." Our own busyness, which is a matter of choice, and our own preoccupation are our biggest hindrances to living a life that "sees" others.

9. New Testament scholar David Rensberger summarizes the key takeaway of 1st John 3.17 as follows: "To have and not give is a Christian contradiction." So in 1st John 3.17 the opposite of Christian love is not hate nor is it fear (as it in [1st John 4.17-18](#)), it is inactivity and indifference. And, don't miss it, to have, to see, to open your heart, and to give into a need or lack is in fact to love like God loves us.

10. By the way, if you go back and reread [1st John 3.16-19](#), you'll see that there's a lot at stake in our choice to love deeply, actively, thoughtfully, and generously. Do we want to feel that we dwell in God's love and it dwells in us? Do you want to know that you're on the side of what's true, good, and right? And do you want your own heart to be reassured when you and God draw near to one another? Love is how all of that happens.

Love in Deed and Truth this Week

1. Some good reflection questions for the week:
 - Where in your life or toward whom do you have a "touch and go" kind of love?
 - How can we be more active in, work harder at, or cultivate the practice of love? And toward whom?
 - What do you have to give others? Revisit point 7 in the sermon summary above.
 - Ask God to open your eyes to see the needs in the people you encounter this week, and then keep a log of what you see.
 - Every day this week, try to see a need and give yourself in love to meet it. It could be small, personal or tangible or material. Keep a list.

2. Here are some reflections that will keep you connected to the heart and action of Christian love this week...several will help you dive more deeply into writers/scholars/theologians mentioned in the sermon:

- [Thomas Merton on Love](#)
- [Henri Nouwen: Love Deeply](#)
- [Breathing in Love, Breathing out Fear](#)
- [The Power of Love](#)
- [Philosopher Erich Fromm on the Art of Loving and What Is Keeping Us from Mastering It](#)
- [Kierkegaard, Freedom, and the Psychology of Love | Psychology Today](#)