

WEEKEND 05/06 November 2022 "Integrity"

(1 John 4:19-21)

Good weekend to you my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

Integrity is an important word in the human journey, isn't it? Every marriage, every family, every business transaction, in fact in every segment of society we seek 'integrity' don't we? And what happens in your heart when you discover a lack of integrity in someone or an organization? I wonder how you define "Integrity"? Do these words contribute to 'integrity'... 'trustworthy', 'honest', 'reliable', 'respect', 'honor'. I wonder what other words you would add to this list, and can you name 5 people you consider people of 'integrity'?

Here's an important question for all of us: *Is integrity a word which should characterize an authentic Christian, no matter their age, their gender, their marital status, or where they live in the world?* As we continue our journey with the apostle John, he's nearing the end of his fourth chapter of his first little letter. He's writing to all Christians everywhere in the first century, but even though John's letter is nearly 20 centuries old, *his words challenge every person in the world in our day who considers themselves to be a Christian.*

Let's watch as John rolls out his parchment, picks up his stylus and starts to again write what the Holy Spirit speaks into his heart and mind: ***"We love because God first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates their brother, they are a liar. For anyone who does not love their brother, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And God has given us this command: 'Whoever loves God must also love their brother.'" (1 John 4:19-21)***

Do you feel the penetrating finger of the Holy Spirit of God challenging you and me to look into the mirror again and search our hearts? What did John mean by saying ***"We love because God first loved us"***? *One of the fundamental, distinguishing principles of our Christian faith is that God INITIATES His love reach to humanity!* Many Scriptures make it plain, but may I share with you one of my favorites? Romans 5:8 says: ***"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*** It's clear, isn't it? And when you link this with many other similar verses in the Bible, the picture is very clear. Sinful humanity continues to reject God, in every generation, as Romans 1:18-32 makes very plain.

But in the face of that rejection, God initiated HIS love reach to us by sending His Son Jesus to earth to live among sinful humanity and both tell us and prove to us how much God loves EVERY person He has created! And more, God longs for a love relationship with every person, and God wants it so much HE has paid the price needed for you and me and anyone to be forgiven of our sin which separates us from God, and then God will draw us into a forgiven, love relationship with Him! Of course, we understand that possibility required God to sacrifice His Son Jesus to pay for our sin!! Do we see now why John writes: ***"We love because God first loved us."***

We have the ability to love other people as God loves us ONLY if we have received God's love and it has changed us from the inside out!

That's why John makes it very clear *INTEGRITY is essential in a legitimate, authentic relationship between any human being and God! It is impossible to claim a love relationship with God while at the same time harbor hatred toward another person who also claims a love relationship with God.*

When John uses the word "**brother**" normally he is not speaking of a biological family sibling, but rather John is talking about the 'family of God' and all those who have been adopted by God into His family as part of their salvation experience. "**Brother**" is not intended to be a gender specific word, it is all inclusive, male and female, regardless of age or ethnicity.... the family of God.

Therefore, John is clearly identifying yet another evidence of an authentic Christian: a person who has experienced the transforming work of God in their life as the love sacrifice of Jesus has been applied to their sin and they are forgiven by God and adopted by God into His family.

Then, as these authentic Christian experiences the life transforming work of the Holy Spirit in their life they will be convicted by the Holy Spirit if they are harboring hatred toward a fellow Christian. If they do not feel that conviction, then John is telling us that is evidence the Holy Spirit does not reside in them and they are not yet an authentic, born-again Christian! Jesus had made it clear "**Love one another as I have loved you...then they will know you are My disciples when you love one another.**" (John 13:34,35)

Finally, my friends, *do you notice John calling us to consider the great challenge it is to believe in and have a relationship with God whom we cannot see?* No matter where you live in the world, I'm sure you are well acquainted with many religions which produce man-made statues of various kinds and invite people to come and pray to those statues, light incense in front of those statues, even sometimes put food in front of those man-made concrete or plastic statues. **God calls that idolatry and it's an abomination to God.**

Several powerful chapters in the Bible explain God's hatred of idolatry and the insanity of it! Jeremiah 10 is one of the most graphic: "**Hear what the LORD says: the customs of the peoples are worthless; they cut a tree out of the forest and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel. They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so it will not totter. Like a scarecrow in a melon patch, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk... But the LORD is the true God, He is the living God, the eternal King... God made the earth by His power...He stretched out the heavens by His understanding.**" Oh my, I love that powerful contrast of man-made gods as compared to the one and only living, almighty, creator God.

We understand, of course, that it is much easier to establish a relationship with a person you see than with a person you can't see. *But with God FAITH is a primary component of any relationship with Him.* Hebrews 11:6 says it this way: ***"Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him."*** From beginning to end of the Bible, and from the first human being to the end of time *FAITH in God is essential to any relationship with God. So how do you measure your spiritual faith, my friends? How strong is your faith? How are you developing your faith in God?* Do we see why John emphasized the contrast between loving God whom we cannot see while hating a 'brother' we can see!

Oh my, so much wonderful, powerful God truth for us to contemplate today my friends. Let's pause right here and I urge you to read those three verses of 1 John 4:19-21 over and over, asking the Holy Spirit to speak to you *and show you what God sees in your heart!* And here's a wonderful worship song to help us meditate on God's truth...

Today's Scripture is 1 John 4:19-21.