

Pastor's Note

Hello

We've been exploring God's character and we've discovered that God is Holy and His Holiness is pure light, there is no evil in Him. God's Holiness requires justice and He is just. God's justice is always merciful and He loves mercy. Because of God's great mercy He offers us the free gift of grace. God's mercy and grace flow from His lovingkindness because God is kind. God is Holy, He is just, He is merciful, He is full of grace, and God is kind. All of these characteristics of God emanate from the very essence of who He is. 1 John 4:7-8 *"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love."* God Is Love.

That is who God is. He is love. At the very core of all of the characteristics of God we find the very nature of God; love. Everything that God does flows from His love. You've seen Star Wars and you know that a Jedi's strength flows from the force. Where do you think that concept came from? The very essence of who God is flows from his love. And this week we will discover together the true nature of the character of God's love. This is what the Word says about love in Isaiah 54:7-10 *"For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In an outburst of anger I hid My face from you for a moment, but with everlasting lovingkindness I will have compassion on you," Says the Lord your Redeemer. 'For this is like the days of Noah to Me, when I swore that the waters would not flood the earth again; so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you nor will I rebuke you. For the mountains may be removed and the hills may shake, but My lovingkindness will not be removed from you, and My covenant of peace will not be shaken,' says the Lord who has compassion on you."*

Isaiah 42:3-4 says this, *"He won't brush aside the bruised and the hurt and he won't disregard the small and insignificant, but he'll steadily and firmly set things right. He won't tire out and quit. He won't be stopped until he's finished his work-to set things right on earth."* God is about the business of setting things right on earth. Everything He does, He does to fulfill that purpose. God is constantly doing. Notice what the scripture says, *"He'll steadily and firmly set things right. He won't tire out and quit. He won't be stopped until He's finished His work."* God is constantly doing

and God is love. By definition love does something. As I said last week, love is not a gooey feeling we get when our hormones are raging. Love is defined by actions. Love does not describe some esoteric emotional state. Love does something. It is moved to action on behalf of the object of ones love.

As Christians we are called to love one another. We are God's hands and feet on earth. To the extent that we receive love from God and give it to others, we transform another little piece of the earth and reclaim it for God. Little by little, year by year, we humans understand more about the nature of love and the earth moves a little bit closer to what God intends it to be. Our job as Christians and as members of Macedonia Christian Church is to transform our community through acts of love. Proverbs 19:17 *"Love to the needy is a loan to God, and God pays back those loans in full."* We define the needy as all who do not know the love of God and are not experiencing a loving relationship with Him. There are plenty of needy in our community who do not know God's love. A mean spirited and hateful individual can be completely transformed by regular, persistent doses of God's love? But because in many cases, religious experiences have been unfulfilling for them, they have never entered into a relationship with God that is personal enough for them to begin receiving His healing and His transforming love. Many people have tried religion and discovered it did not change them at all.

Religion often gives people rules to follow and laws to keep. It can even lead them to believe they must earn God's love before they are good enough to receive it. That is the exact opposite of truth we find in Biblical teaching. 1 John 4:19 says, *"We love Him because He first loved us."* It is the love of God that leads us to relationship with Him and spiritual growth, not keeping laws and rules. We can't receive God's love if we go through life thinking He's always mad at us because we broke a rule. As Christians we must meet people where they are and show them love, not rules and laws. Religious law has the ability to do two things:

a. If we follow it perfectly it can make us holy. Which, of course, no human can do.

b. The second thing religious law can do is to actually increase sin.

Jesus frequently spoke against the religious leaders of His day. He said some very stern things about them and to them. Look at Matthew 23:4 *"They tie up heavy loads, hard to bear, and place them on men's shoulders, but they themselves will not lift a finger to help bear them."* God did not send Jesus to the cross to start a religion. They already had plenty

of religion before Jesus came. Do you want to know what Jesus thought of the religious leaders of his day?

Look at John 9:35-41 *"When Jesus heard what had happened, he found the man and asked, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' The man answered, 'Who is he, sir? I want to believe in him.' 'You have seen him,' Jesus said, 'and he is speaking to you!' 'Yes, Lord, I believe!' the man said. And he worshiped Jesus. Then Jesus told him, 'I entered this world to render judgment; to give sight to the blind and to show those who think they see that they are blind.' Some Pharisees who were standing nearby heard him and asked, 'Are you saying we're blind?' 'If you were blind, you wouldn't be guilty,' Jesus replied. 'But you remain guilty because you claim you can see.'"*

Jesus came to show us how to have a deep and personal relationship with God. People don't need a religion; they need a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Telling people what to do is simply not enough; we must show them. A great many religious people have shown us how to reject, criticize, and judge others but they have not shown us how to love others. Religious people tend to love conditionally. They love those that are just like them. They tell the people that are not like them they need to change to be a part of their group. Religious people want others to clean up and fly right and then they will be accepted.

Unfortunately, the only definition of cleanup and fly right that is acceptable to the religious is foreign to those who do not know the love of God. It grieves me when I think of how many people are looking for the answer to their problems out there in the world, simply because they tried religion and were met with rules, laws, rejection, and judgment and were never shown the love of God. Unconditional love does not allow people to remain the same. Instead, it loves them while they are changing. Unconditional love will overcome life's problems and transform people. Proverbs 10:12 says, *"Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions."*

You see people don't need rules and laws crammed down their throat. They need love. Back in the day of Moses, when the understanding and experience of love was still in its childhood for humans, we needed the law so that we would begin to treat each other decently. It was a starting point on the journey toward learning how to love one another. But when the time was right, God sent Jesus to replace the old laws with a new one. As Jesus taught us in, John 13:34-35 "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved

you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples; when they see the love you have for each other."

John 15:9-16 says, *"Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep my commandment you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from the Father, I have made known to you."*

Martin Luther (1483-1546) was born in Thuringia (Saxony) in what is now the country of Germany. His parents had money so he was able to go to school. When Martin Luther was seventeen he enrolled in the University of Erfurt in the year 1501. He received his Bachelor's degree in only one year and his Master's degree three years later. As soon as he completed his Master's degree, he enrolled in the law school of the University of Erfurt. One day in the year 1505 while walking in the woods, Martin Luther got caught in a terrible thunderstorm and he began to run to seek shelter at the school. But before he reached the safety of the school, lightning struck near where he was running. It was so close to him in fact that he cried out to St. Anne, "Help, St. Anne! I'll become a monk!" (according to Roman Catholic tradition St. Anne is the mother of the Virgin Mary).

Martin Luther survived the near death experience and true to his word, he dropped out of law school and entered the monastery. Now back in 1500 they did not study the bible at monasteries. They studied the teachings of the Catholic Church in Rome. Monks did what they were taught to do and they told everyone who lived around them what to do, according to the teaching of the church in Rome. Very few people could read and write in 1500. Most people were peasants and never went to school. So in matters of faith, the word of the local monk was just as if God were speaking. No one questioned the church. In those days emissaries from Rome would ride all throughout Christendom selling indulgences. They would ride into your village and tell you how much you needed to give to the church to secure a place in heaven when you died. They had a little saying, "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul into heaven springs."

Now Martin Luther had a sister who committed suicide, which in the Roman Catholic Church is a mortal sin and left no way for her to get into heaven. But an emissary told Martin Luther that if he paid an indulgence for his sister, she would be let into heaven. So he did. Still uncertain however, he traveled to Rome to seek audience with the Holy Father. The Pope told him to pray the Sacred Steps at St. Peter's Basilica as an additional indulgence and God would let her into heaven. Praying the Sacred Steps involves going up down a 30 step, stone staircase, on your knees and prying at each step on the way up and on the way down. Martin Luther prayed the steps until his knees were bloody but in his sole he was still unsure if his sister would get into heaven. So Martin Luther did something quite remarkable for his day. He began reading the bible for himself. Martin Luther soon began to question the practice of selling Indulgences. Imagine that. He began writing papers called Thesis about teachings from the Roman Catholic Church that needed to be corrected based on the word of God. He nailed 95 Thesis to his church door at Wittenberg as his way of publicly posting them for others to read. And read they did. Martin Luther was excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church in 1521. Soon after he became the first person to translate and publish the Bible in the common language of the German people.

Religion gets twisted over time. The Law of Moses was quite twisted 1400 years later when Jesus arrived. Jesus said, "...you remain guilty because you claim you can see." Religion gets twisted over time. 1500 years after Jesus, Martin Luther started the Protestant Reformation because Christianity had been twisted into a religion it was never intended to be. Christianity has always and will always be God's call to humanity into a relationship. Martin Luther said it best when he said, "Love God and live as you please." Think about that. Love God and live as you please. Once you grasp the depth of the first two words, the last half of the phrase takes on a whole new meaning. Love God and live as you please. Everything we do is framed by our love for God. We draw our purpose for every action we take out of that framework. A Christian's faith flows from God's love. In God's recapturing of the earth, the heart and mind are the battlefield. What we choose to do and the actions we take will determine the outcome of the battle. Love should drive our choices and determine our actions.

We see in the western Judaeo-Christian culture today the effects of God's influence on our character as human beings. Love is transforming

the human race. It is a painfully slow process but when you compare historical cultures and even today's non Judaeo-Christian cultures there is a stark difference. We're nowhere near where we need to be but God's love has brought us a long way. Romans 9:35-39 says this, *"Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation or distress, or persecution, or famine or nakedness, or peril or sword? ...But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

We can be confident that God's love will work; in our homes, where we work, and throughout our community. We just need to apply it. He gives each of us an ample supply of grace so that there is always plenty left over to share with others. Look at what Ephesians 5:2 Says, *"Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that."* God is on the move in His creation and he is calling you into a relationship with him so you can join him. Isaiah 42:3-4 says, *"He won't brush aside the bruised and the hurt and he won't disregard the small and insignificant, but he'll steadily and firmly set things right. He won't tire out and quit. He won't be stopped until he's finished his work; to set things right on earth."* And God wants to include you in all of this. So, don't miss the best life has to offer, find God!

Blessings,

Scott

