

Real Faith for Real People:
“Does Love Really Make the World Go 'Round?”
1 John 4:15-21

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What makes the world go 'round? Do you ever ask yourself that question? In our global economy, many people would say that money makes the world go 'round. How else can one explain our obsession with the stock market and the federal manipulation of interest rates?

Some might say that power makes the world go 'round. That might be why two smart men would spend 2 million dollars each trying to be elected mayor of Nashville. A job, mind you, that pays \$136,000 a year! Hunger for recognition and status is in our blood stream.

For a growing number of the world-wide pornography peddlers, sex, at least a perverted version of it, makes the world go 'round. Pornography is now a 13.3 billion dollar business. Porn web sites draw 72 million visitors a month.

Our founder, John Wesley, had a better idea. He believed that love could make the world go 'round. Love, for John Wesley, meant undivided devotion to God and abiding respect for people. “This love,” said Wesley, “we believe to be the medicine of life, the never failing remedy for all the evils of a disordered world, for all the miseries and vices of the human race. This religion we long to establish in the world, a religion of love and joy and peace.” Wow - what if Wesley was right?

“YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, WITH ALL YOUR MIND.”

This is the First and greatest Commandment. And the Second is like it, **“LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”** All The Law and Prophets hang on these two Commandments.

That is what Jesus said to the Pharisees who questioned his authority as a teacher. That is what every Jewish boy and girl recite as they learn the Shema as commanded in the Old Testament. That is what Jesus told a young, inquisitive attorney to do if he wanted to find the meaning in his life. Love. Love. Love. The Gospel in a word is LOVE.

LOVE GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, SOUL AND MIND.

Godly love is not some warm, topsy-turvy, spine-tingling feeling talked about in songs by the likes of Perry Como, Madonna and Ashley Simpson. Godly love is a deep, abiding, life-shaping, everlasting devotion.

Do you love the Lord? People who love the Lord, “have no other gods before Him.” If you love God, then God is a priority. Joshua said it well in the Old

Testament when he declared, *“Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!”* Life is a choice. We Americans are choosing all the time. Will it be: Hedonism or Holiness, Materialism or the Master, Nationalism or New Life in Christ, Religion or Righteousness?

People who love the Lord are devoted to the Lord. Love is not a second-hand emotion. It is a first-rate devotion. It takes time to be holy. Are you willing to devote time to God? It takes perseverance to be Godly. All great Saints struggled with their faith, so what is all the fuss about Mother Teresa? Are you willing to live with the questions when there are no easy answers? It takes surrender to follow the will of God. *“Not my will but Thine be done,”* cries the Father’s own Son as he knelt there in dark Gethsemane.

And the Second Commandment is no less important than the first. ***“LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOU LOVE YOURSELF.”***

Neighbors are nearby; they are up close and personal. Spouses all over this congregation are dying to hear the simple words “I love you” from their husbands or wives. Is that really too much to ask?

Children do not need more “stuff” from their parents. They are over indulged already. Your children need you. They need you to be emotionally present. They need you to set respectable boundaries. They need you to teach them the true values of life.

Let our love be sincere. Did you hear about the ex-fiancé who wrote this letter to her ex-boyfriend? “Dear John, Words cannot express the deep regret I feel at having broken our engagement. Will you take me back? No one but you could fill the void. Please forgive me. I love you, Susan. P.S. Congratulations on winning the lottery.”

Neighbors are far away, some emotionally, some physically. It is a human tragedy to regard as enemies anyone unlike us. Demonizing has become a tragic sin of modern America. It infiltrates our country, our churches, our communities, our common conversation, and it needs to stop. Police profiling is wrong. Name calling by religious institutions is immoral. Economic segregation by housing needs to be reconsidered. Class, color and creed discrimination is increasing, not decreasing.

One way to diffuse this rampant hate might be to get together and seek to understand one another.

If our enemies are now going to be some nation of Islam, when will our churches and schools begin to teach the histories, cultures and beliefs of Islamic people? Dare we even ask the question, “Why do some people hate us so much?” Instead of declaring Nashville an English-only speaking community, maybe we all need to learn Spanish, French, New York and California dialects. What if we learned the names of the poor on the street instead of labeling them homeless bums who are a nuisance to society? As Wesley said, “Though we cannot think alike, may we not

love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion?"

WHY NOT BE MADE PERFECT IN LOVE?

That was the question Wesley raised with Methodists. Why not a better way? Why not a higher road? Why not the best? Well, why not?

Before some of you become cynical, let me offer an explanation. There will never be a perfect sermon. There is no such thing as a perfect Church. Perfectionist personalities are a pain for us all. Christians who want to parade their perfectionist piety are persons to be pitied. Yet, can we not be better at love than we often are? Is not God able to make and mold us into more loving people if he could just get our permission?

Being made perfect in love, casts out fear. We have created a culture of fear in America. Terrorists, predators, drug dealers, war and even the weather are playing havoc with our feelings of security and our lives of peace. God can help us change that!

I choose to live by faith, not fear. I know the uncertainty of the unknown as well as anyone here, but I choose not to be possessed by it. I choose to live each day by faith, trusting my future to God.

We need to dedicate ourselves anew to safe communities in all our neighborhoods. It is not enough for us to live in safety. All God's children deserve to be kept from harm's way. Love can find a way.

We do not need another crime documentary, another back stabbing reality show, another voyeuristic coverage of sexual predator pick-ups. We need examples of love and mercy, kindness and generosity, hope and humility. That is what the heavenly kingdom is made of.

Being made Perfect in Love develops Christ-like people. Let us be honest! Is there anybody anywhere, Christian or un-Christian, religious or non-religious, who does not believe that Jesus Christ showed the world a better way to live? What keeps us from adopting His values and imitating His life style?

As my fellow Kentuckian Wendell Berry writes, "In times like these when we have been most cruelly hurt by those who hate us, it is hard to speak of the way of peace and to remember that Christ enjoined us to love our enemies, but this is no less necessary for being difficult."

What if it were possible for God to make us and mold us, forgive us and restore us, love us and redeem us until we think like Christ thought, live like Christ lived, and believe as Christ believed? Would that not be a better life for us all?

Why not a sanctified life?

Why not a holy life?

Why not a life of love?

Why not?

