

"He Loves Me, He Loves Me Not." – July 16, 2017
by Wayne J. Schneider – Credo in Unam Deum

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1 John 4:7-21

"Dear Friends, let's love each other, because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born from God and knows God."

In 1967, John Lennon and Paul McCartney, were asked to write and perform a song for a live broadcast that would go out all across the world. The song they wrote and chose was "All You Need Is Love." It was an instant hit. Lennon was fascinated by slogans and their power to unite. Love is all you need has a simple, and yet profound message

Jesus said it this way, *"By this, all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another."* John 13:35. Have you been flawlessly loved? Loved in such a manner that you could safely be yourself? No masks. No concealing. No fear. Free to be yourself, share your thoughts, feelings, and dreams?

God's love is made perfect in our relationships with other "Followers of the Way." Does this sound unachievable in light of your past experiences with the 'church?' Too much to expect? Or, perhaps it sounds fascinating, attractive, and challenging. If anything, it is an astonishing statement. And, our passage in 1st John speaks to it.

We have all seen ordinary people do extraordinary things. They accomplish these achievements because they step through their fears and overcome their anxieties. To love God, others, and even ourselves, "Followers of the Way" need to be aggressively attentive to Jesus' command to love, not only our neighbors but our enemies as well as ourselves.

St. John expresses it distinctly: love is connected with God. These verses in 1st John verify that the nature of God is love. Chiefly, St. John refers to the love for God and for others. It is certain that love is the mantra for all humanity. "Followers of the Way" who demonstrate love for God, others, and themselves reveal the cornerstone of Christianity.

The Apostle pens a cutting admonishment however, to remind believers that they must love with no boundaries. Please listen to verse 20 again: "*If anyone says, I love God and hates a sister or a brother, he is a liar because the person who doesn't love a brother or a sister who can be seen can't love God, who can't be seen.*"

Do you remember the bumper sticker that read, "Honk if you love Jesus?" How easy it was to forget you had that sticker on your bumper when someone honked at you in response! God does not abide double standards.

On September 12th, 2011, a "Eagles" band member, Don Henley wrote: "*Why is there all this fighting over who will be anointed?*" This is a theological question that fits with St. John's lesson for today. We understand that God has both created and anointed all things out of love, and has called us to communicate this love regardless of our differences, and even when we face indifference and opposition.

If we would stop this whirly-gig we call the world, long enough to honestly ask the question: "*Why the hate between Christian and Muslim, Shiite and Sunni, Democrat and Republican, Liberal and Conservative, me and the neighbor across the street,*" I think we would see it originates from loving God while hating others. Sometimes, our convictions are so headstrong, that rather than loving others as God asks, we display intolerance by not even noticing that person. The cry I often hear is "*Why can't you see me?*"

When asked what is the opposite of love, we often say 'hate,' but isn't it really indifference? To devalue another by not even recognizing her worth, by

ignoring his existence, is to state the opposite of love. St. John reminds us that to love God and ourselves, we must love others.

And, this apathy is not passive, because there are some outraged people out there, who vigorously counteract love. Individuals who are remorseless have no morals. Our country's leadership appears to have lost its ethical compass, and much of our citizenship seems not to know right from wrong.

In the gospel according to St. Luke, Jesus is on his way to the temple and is using physical force to drive out the money changers and merchants who sell sacrificial animals. I do not believe there is any other time when Jesus uses or approves of, violence to influence people. While this is a case of 'righteous' anger, it is atypical of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. But here, Jesus does the most loving action.

As a parent, I know there are times when 'tough' love is necessary, but the goal of love is a gentle, Spirit-led relationship. This begs the question: "How do we love in the face of so much difference?"

It is my belief that love succeeds when compassionate people love with a sense of justice. Love wins when we love with a long-term methodology. In November of 1987, I experienced my first Haiti Medical Team ministry. Two weeks in the western half of the island of Hispaniola, with physicians, nurses, and 'grunts' like me. It changed my life. Haiti is a 4th world country with poverty and pain that tears you apart and leaves you weeping and sleepless.

I took part in 12 or 13 Haiti Medical Teams, where we treated a total of over 1000 patients. Because I am 'slow,' I made 6 or 7 trips before I realized that, while we did help our Haitian sisters and brothers, it was only at the moment; in reality, all of the work was, in the long run, was ineffective. While we were there, yes. But, after we left, there was nothing for the village. Love is meant to be long-running.

Love's power is to be used in our relationships. It would be marvelous if all of our interactions with others were spectacular experiences, but often they are not. People are sometimes users and abusers and if you stop and lovingly help someone you may not get just your hands dirty. It can be a messy business.

As "Followers of the Way" we will find Joy and happiness, but we may also find trouble too. Love happens in spite of us and when we least expect it.

To be Christ's ambassadors we must love unconditionally. Alleluia. Amen.