

Easter 5
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1 John 3:18-24
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Easter Living – We Live in God’s Love

- I. We are confident of God’s love.
- II. We reflect God’s love in our lives.

Dear Christian friends,

When couples come to me for **pre-marital counseling** I always ask them two questions. The first one is, “WHY do you want to get married?” **Of course** they always answer, “BECAUSE WE LOVE each other.” Then I ask them, “WHAT DO YOU MEAN when you say you love each other?” Then the hemming and hawing begins! They look at each other – GROPING – STRUGGLING to find the **right words**. It’s hard to EXPLAIN WHAT love is!

That second question is **so important** for a good marriage. A wrong definition of love can MAKE A MESS of a marriage. That’s also true for our **every-day lives**. We are called to live lives of love – love FOR GOD and each other. The **10 Commandments** can be summed up with that one word – love. We have Jesus’ command to **“love one another”** AS HE has loved us.

Today we look more closely at love – GOD’S love for us and OUR LOVE for God and each other. Easter living means WE LIVE IN GOD’S LOVE. **Living in God’s love** 1)we are confident of **God’s** love and 2)we reflect God’s love in our lives.

I. We are confident of God’s love.

“Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.” Isn’t THAT THE WAY God loves us? God doesn’t love us WITH JUST words. Oh, words are a part of our lives of love. **With words** we express our love. **Every day** HUSBANDS and wives need to hear each other say, “I love you.” **Every day** CHILDREN and parents need to hear each other say, “I love you.” **Every day** we need to hear GOD SAY, “I love you.” But love dare never stop WITH JUST WORDS! Words of love that are not backed up with CONCRETE ACTS of love are meaningless.

God loves us – NOT JUST with words but **“with actions and in truth.”** God shows us that love is not just a FUZZY FEELING or an emotion. Love is a NOTHING-HELD-BACK giving of oneself to another person. But love is even more than that. **God’s love** is not based on the OBJECT of His love but **simply** ON WHOM God is. God doesn’t love us because we are so CUTE and adorable – but just because God is SO LOVING. **God’s love doesn’t worry** if a person DESERVES His love – or how they will RESPOND to His love. **God’s love doesn’t bother** with “WHAT’S IN IT for Me?” or “What’s it going to COST Me?” **God’s love sees a person** – sees a NEED – and it goes into action.

THAT is the love God has for us. In the next chapter John wrote, **“This is how God sowed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”**

God loves us with WORDS - He tells us **over and over**, “I love you.” God also loves us **“with action and in truth.”** In love God GAVE us His own **Son to be** our Savior. John reminds us that God **“knows everything.”** God knows ALL our sins – **all the times** we’ve ignored and defied His commandments. But God didn’t say, “I CAN’T LOVE them **after what they’ve done** to Me.” It’s the exact opposite! God said, “I LOVE them and I MUST HELP them!” Because of GOD’S KIND of love we have Jesus. LOOK AGAIN at that life of perfect obedience Jesus lived in our place. Stand again

at the cross and watch Jesus sacrifice His life to pay for all our sins. Peer again into Jesus' empty grave and hear Him say, ***"Because I live, you shall live also."*** Come to Holy Communion and RECEIVE THE PROOF of God's love for you – Jesus' true body and blood given and shed for the forgiveness of all our sins. THAT'S HOW MUCH God loves you and me! **For Jesus' sake** God has forgiven all our sins. **In Jesus** God had made you and me His dear children – promised you and me eternal life in heaven when we die.

Easter living is BEING CONFIDENT of God's love. Our relationship with God is built on GOD'S LOVE for us. Our faith is **not based** on our FEELINGS but on the FACTS of the **gospel**. John writes, ***"This ...is how we set our hearts at rest in His presence whenever our hearts condemn us."*** John speaks of ***"the confidence we have before God."***

Our hearts often condemn us. **"How** can you SAY YOU'RE A CHRISTIAN after what you've done?!" Our hearts know the UNSPOKEN WORDS of spite – anger – selfishness – jealousy – **hate** that have lurked in our minds. Our HEARTS ARE RIGHT in **condemning** us for that! OUR CONFIDENCE is that God has overruled our hearts! ***"God is greater than our hearts."*** God doesn't deny our sins – He punished Jesus in our place. God doesn't owe us help – but IN LOVE **for Jesus' sake** God promises to hear and answer all our prayers. God **doesn't owe** us eternal life in heaven because we've been SUCH GOOD people. We aren't! But IN LOVE **for Jesus' sake** God has promised us eternal life in heaven. I don't know why or how God CAN LOVE US that much. It doesn't make any sense after the **way we've treated** Him. But the PROOF of God's love for us is undeniable. We have Jesus' cross and empty grave. Easter living is BEING CONFIDENT of God's love and then...

II. We reflect God's love in our lives.

Our love FOR GOD should not be ***"with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."*** I don't know any Christian who would say he **doesn't** love God. But let's be careful that our love for God is NOT JUST WORDS! Through Isaiah God NAILED the Jews - ***"these people honor Me with their lips but their hearts are far from Me."*** Every day we should be telling God we love Him. Every day we should be telling OTHER PEOPLE that we love God. But our WORDS of love must be backed up with LIVES of love. **If** I SAY I love God but don't have time to **faithfully worship** Him – what am I REALLY SAYING?

We show our love for God BY THE ROLE His Word has in our everyday lives – by LETTING GOD'S WORD guide and shape our lives. Think back to how the Catechism explains the 10 Commandments. Every explanation to every commandment begins, ***"We should fear and LOVE God"*** - love God NOT JUST WITH WORDS but ***"with actions and in truth"*** – with a love that gives God FIRST PLACE in our hearts and lives and schedules. Real love for God does not use God's name to curse or swear – does not despise God's Word as **boring** or **irrelevant**. **Real love** for God makes us honor and obey our moms and dads not ONE SPECIAL DAY a year but every day. IN REAL LOVE for God our big concern is "What does GOD WANT me to do?" **In love for God** what I THINK or I FEEL – what OTHERS are doing – that doesn't overrule what GOD TELLS me to do.

Easter living is REFLECTING God's love in our love FOR OTHER people. Here too we must be careful ***"not to love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."*** We learn from God HOW TO LOVE each other. God doesn't just PUT UP with us. He loves us. REFLECTING God's love is not carrying grudges but ***"forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you."*** We can't always FORGET THE WRONGS others have done to us but we won't let that control us or determine how we treat them. **If** I'm having a HARD TIME **forgiving** someone then I need to go back

to HOW GOD has forgiven me – to HOW MUCH and HOW OFTEN God has forgiven me. Jesus said, ***“If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive you your sins.”*** To refuse to forgive someone is to JEOPARDIZE my **relationship** with God and MAKE A MOCKERY of God’s love. Our relationship with God is based on God’s FAITHFUL, FORGIVING love. Our relationships with other people are built on THAT SAME faithful, forgiving love.

Easter living is REFLECTING God’s love BY GIVING OURSELVES to other people. Love exposes us to being HURT or TAKEN ADVANTAGE of. That happens – but it shouldn’t stop us from loving. It doesn’t stop God from loving us! **Christian love** PUTS THE NEEDS OF OTHERS ahead of our own. Today people will help out if they FEEL like it – if they HAVE TIME or NOTHING BETTER to do – if it won’t cost them too much. That’s not Christian love – that’s SELFISHNESS and LAZINESS! **Christian love** sees a need and PITCHES in. Love’s big concern is BEING HELPFUL – not is it CONVENIENT for me.

That’s the love GOD HAS SHOWN us. That’s the love we are to REFLECT in our daily lives. God **in particular** applies His love to marriage. ***“Husbands, love your wives JUST AS Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.”*** Think HOW MUCH STRONGER and HEALTHIER marriages and families will be when this SELF-GIVING – self-DENYING – self-SACRIFICING love is practiced by all in the family. When husbands stop worrying what **their wives can do** for them and concentrate instead on what THEY CAN DO for their wives – what a difference that would make! When wives stop counting all the things they do that NOBODY NOTICES and so BECOME RESENTFUL but instead see all that as ways opportunities for them to **show their love** for their husbands and children – what a difference that would make! When children stop seeing their parents AS WALLETS to be picked – as OLD FOGIES who **don’t understand** anything and instead think of how they CAN LOVE, honor and obey their parents as gifts from God – what a difference that would make! It BOGGLES THE MIND to think of that love put into practice!

I’d like to close with some verses from Romans 12. After reminding the Roman Christians of GOD’S GREAT LOVE for them Paul wrote, ***“Love must be sincere. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay evil for evil. As far as it DEPENDS ON YOU, live at peace with everyone.”*** That’s Easter living – LIVING IN GOD’S LOVE – reflecting God’s love in our lives. Amen.

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