

God speaks. We are to have ears to hear, ears to listen. That is what we talked about last week. Today, our scripture text from 1 John 4 invites us to build upon our hearing and listening. It invites us to have the heart, have the courage, to obey. Because what good is it to hear and listen to God only to not follow and do what we know is right and truthful and obedient to God? Specifically, our scripture text from 1 John 4 paints a picture of what being obedient to God looks like.

Read 1 John 4:7-21

Anyone surprised to hear that love is at the core of what it looks like to be obedient to God? I would be surprised if you were surprised. First and foremost, LOVE!! When all else seems to be off and unsettling and you feel like you just don't know anymore- about God, about life, about family, about situations, about circumstances, about friends- turn to LOVE!

John reveals a few truths about love that we are to hold on to...

- God IS love!... Affiliation with God is the same as affiliation with love. What this tells us is that those related to God, practice love!
- Divine love is a concrete act. Divine love is measured in God's sending of Christ to be born, live, heal, show compassion, build up, teach in spirit and truth, pray, die, rise, and ascend. Therefore, so is Christian love.
- God's love evokes our love and not the other way around. Divine love is both a model for how to love and a power that enables love.

What?

- Vs. 11... **“since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.”**

Why?

- Vs. 12... **“Because no one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and God's love is perfected in us.”**
- Vs. 13... **“By this we know that we abide in God and God in us, because God has given us the Spirit.”** The word abide here means to remain with, be connected to- like a branch of a tree to a trunk, like a branch connected to the vine.

Proof!

- Vss. 16-21... **“we have boldness on the day of judgment”**- John writes that the last days are here and preparations must be made. None more important than knowing whether you believe, for believers having nothing to fear.
- **“There is no fear in love, but perfect love (Divine love) casts out fear.”** Since Christ was in this world, we have a model and courage to live here as well.
- **“those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.”** This isn't just a love for our siblings, but all our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Mark 12:30-31 highlights further the role of love in what it looks like to be obedient to God. The great commandment, derived from the Shema in Deuteronomy, is really six words, “Love God, Love Others, with all!” You all, God paints the picture for us and makes the way clear. LOVE with all you got! Not 50% here or 50% there. Not 80% this day and 20% the next. LOVE with all you got 100%! It is just this simple! Yet, it is just this hard, isn't it?

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 also paints a picture of love. Known as the love chapter, it begins by defining what love is not, and verses 1-3 parallel with John's reference in 1 John 4:20, **“Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.”** Paul doesn't refer to this as being a liar, but instead refers to this as being **“a noisy gong or clanging cymbal or nothing.”** Further on in vs. 11, Paul references being **“childish”**- for to not love as God loves us is childish. However, to love is to put away our childish ways.

For all that love is not, love IS so much more. Paul carries on in his brush strokes of divine love, **“love is patient, kind, not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude, does not insist on its own way, is not irritable or resentful, does not rejoice in wrongdoing, rejoices in the truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (*all things present and future*), never ends.”**

I would like to look now to a tangible way in which love is expressed and that is through our words, our speech. Think of it this way if you like. We are to hear and listen to our God who speaks, so that we would also be able to speak in spirit, truth, and love.

I borrow this perspective from Annie F. Downs in her book *Speak Love*. I just appreciate how she captures the power and responsibility we have in using our words, our speech, as a beacon of God's light, love, and life.

“Our words stick around. Which means everything you say- from what you tell your friends, whisper about your enemies, post online, mutter to yourself, or even scream at the celebrity you see at the coffee shop, *or I heard fans yelling at Southpaw and ballplayers last night-* carries a whole lot of power.” How can we use that power to make a real difference; to build up and not tear down? When you speak LOVE (*and here I remind us that affiliation with God is the same as affiliation with love*) to others, to God, to yourself, you speak LIFE. And that’s what matters.”

Annie then writes a letter to us all.

“My friend, I send you into a new season of life. I commission you to go and speak love, to change the world with your words. I challenge you to never be the same person. I pray you know God better, love yourself more, and see other people more clearly. I believe that you have more power of influence than you will ever know; and I encourage you to be a light that influences for Jesus. Proverbs 18:21 says, **“The tongue has the power of life and death.”** Yes, yes it does. You have seen that by now, haven’t you? You’ve seen the difference, in the stories and in scripture and in your own life. I send you out, my sweet friend, to speak love. May the world never be the same because of you.” Sincerely, Annie (*Speak Love*, Annie F. Downs)

May the world never be the same because of you, because of us, because of God’s love!