

FAMILY MATTERS 11: LOVE MATTERS
II John 4-6 (AFBC 7/31/16 195th Anniversary)

Today, we conclude our series of messages on “Family Matters;” AND, we celebrate the 195th Anniversary of this Church! How appropriate that we do this by focusing on the supreme characteristic of our life together in Jesus Christ: “love.”

Those faithful souls who started this church almost two centuries ago knew that “the greatest of these...is love.” The message is the same today as it was then. And it will be the same for all the years to come. Listen for it in our text, II John, verses 4-6:

4 It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us. 5 And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. 6 And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.

Well, I know you’re wondering who is this “dear lady” is. We don’t know. It could be a particular woman in the early church, OR... it may be a reference to the whole church. I chose this passage, though, because it makes it so crystal clear how very much “LOVE MATTERS!”

LET’S TALK ABOUT LOVE: Is there any topic that’s discussed more in our culture—while, at the same time--is there any subject that’s more misunderstood? Love can be very fickle!

Alex Sanders should be a familiar name, having served South Carolina as a judge, a college President, a candidate for Congress, and a founder and President of the Charleston School of Law.

Sanders told a story about his daughter, Zoe—something that happened when she was only three years old—but he told this story while speaking at this daughter’s commencement ceremony when she was graduating from college (with her permission?!?).

Sanders said he came home from work one day and found his little girl in tears. Her pet turtle was lifeless; and she was crying her eyes out. She loved that little turtle, and now he was gone. Mom had tried, but she had not been able to console her; so now it was Daddy’s turn to try.

Here was a man who had been a successful lawyer and political leader. He'd faced all kinds of complex issues; yet THIS was simply out of his league. Still, he tried his best to comfort her.

First, he told her they could go to the pet store and buy another turtle; but even at the tender age of three, she knew that would not be the same--she loved HER turtle--no replacement would do!

Zoe continued to cry, so Sanders tried a different approach: "I tell you what we'll do," he said, "we'll have a funeral for your turtle." Well, Zoe didn't know what a funeral was, so she asked.

Remember, Dad was trying to cheer her up; so he told her a funeral was like a birthday party. "We'll have ice cream and cake and lemonade and balloons; and all your friends can come."

Well...that did the trick--no more tears! In fact, Sanders said his little girl was smiling--she loved parties! But as they were planning the big event, an amazing thing happened. Zoe's turtle...began to move.

Before long, he was crawling around as good as ever—as *alive* as ever. Sanders said he didn't know what to say, but Zoe did. After quickly considering her options, she looked up at her father with those big beautiful eyes—and with all the sweetness and innocence of a young child, she said, "Daddy, LET'S KILL IT!"

Love is fickle! It's a wonderful idea...as long as it doesn't get in the way of something we want more! Relationships that are supposed to be based on love can be quickly discarded if we think they're "getting in the way of our party."

A woman wrote to her "X": **"Dearest Bill, No words could ever express the great unhappiness I've felt since breaking our engagement. Please take me back. No one could ever take your place in my heart, so please forgive me. I love you. Yours forever, Susie. PS And congratulations on winning the lottery!"**

So much of what gets called love today is really self-love. It has nothing to do with what Jesus commanded and what the New Testament teaches.

The verses I read from Second John are the last of many places in the New Testament where we're told to "love one another." Listen to a few others:

1. In John 13:34-35, Jesus says, "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

We're told here that **Loving one another demonstrates that we are followers of Jesus Christ**—that we're His disciples. If love is absent from our lives, it doesn't matter what we say we believe, or who we claim to follow—we do not know Christ as Savior and Lord if love is missing.

2. In Romans 13:9-10, we read, **"The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."**

By loving one another, then, we keep all God's commandments, because **Loving one another fulfills God's law.**

3. I John 3:23 tells us that **Loving one another is commanded by Christ: "And this is His command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us."** So obedience to Christ means we love one another.

It's not always easy to do, though. I ran across a letter to God written by a child. It says, **"Dear God, I bet it's very hard for you to love everybody in the whole world. There are only four people in our family and I can never do it."**

4. This is only a sampling, friends, but this next passage is so important. Listen to how it explains that **Loving one another is our response to God's love for us.:**

I John 4:9-11—**"This is how God showed 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 an atoning sacrifice**

for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

Clearly—clearly--LOVE MATTERS! The foundation of our lives together is the love of Jesus Christ in us. Love really is the greatest of these, and no church survives for 195 years without something of God’s love permeating that body of believers!

About 20 years ago, we took on the task of writing a new church covenant. Anderson First Baptist Church had gone through a difficult chapter in its life, and we needed to refocus.

True to God’s Word, there’s a clear and unmistakable emphasis on love in the document we adopted. Let’s take a look—here’s paragraph 1—read it with me, please:

(PAR. 1) We, the members of Anderson First Baptist Church, having been led by the Holy Spirit to receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and to become participants in this body of baptized believers, do joyfully and sincerely make this covenant together.

Let me tell you what this means to me. I’d love to hear what it means to you as well; but for now, this is what it says to me:

Our being together here, our association as members of this church, is no accident. It’s not a chance happening, but a divinely-orchestrated bringing together of people with gifts, abilities, and this precious faith we share in Jesus Christ.

It’s a powerful combination; but this is not our doing, but God’s. It’s not our church, but His. So the process of leading us to Christ as Savior and Lord, then bringing us together here and growing us up as fellow believers—all of this is directed by the Holy Spirit.

It’s not a relationship to be taken lightly. When two people become husband and wife, they enter into a sacred covenant. With marriage, of course, there are legalities involved. A license is signed, promises are made, and the whole relationship is undergirded by the laws of the state.

But no good marriage has to rely on legal documents. A happy, growing marriage is founded on a loving commitment—and this motivates us to do far more than what any law could ever require.

So, even though there are laws *involved*, we don't think of marriage as a contract, but a covenant—a relationship which we enter into voluntarily, but which at the same time is held in high esteem—cherished even--with both husband and wife committed to making the relationship survive and flourish.

That's also what this church-relationship is about. We enter into this freely—no one forces it on us. But, just as with marriage, if it's truly a blessed relationship, God has a hand in it.

Our being together is no accident. There's purpose in this covenant we share together! And there's joy! Please join me now in the reading of the second paragraph:

(PAR. 2) We will express our love for God by worshipping Him, studying and growing in His Word, communing with Him in prayer, and giving of our lives and resources to accomplish His mission in this world.

Jesus told us we are to love the Lord, our God, with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength—but how do we demonstrate this?

Our covenant lists some of the most important ways: worship, Bible study, prayer, stewardship. Being responsible and disciplined in these areas, giving them the priority they deserve, shows that our love for God is genuine.

In John 4:23, Jesus said, **"Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks."**

And Luke tells us concerning the early church, **(Acts 2:42) "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."**

Demonstrating our love for God is not difficult—but it does require discipline—a willingness to be faithful to the Lord: discipleship!

Another way we show we're serious about the Christian life is by getting involved in the mission to which God has called us. This brings us to paragraph three. Let's read it:

(PAR. 3) We will express our love for others by sharing with them the Good News of Jesus Christ, praying for

them, and participating in ministries which reflect God's love for all people.

Our mission is clear. From 1821 to this very day, our mission is to share the Gospel and care for people. The first assignment is best expressed in the Great Commission:

Matthew 28:19-20--Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

We share the Gospel of Christ with the world; but as has often been noted: "They will not care how much we know...until they know how much we care." So, earlier in Matthew, we also find these words of our Lord:

Matthew 25:34-36--"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

Followers of Christ care for the whole person: body, mind, and soul. This is our mission.

Finally, there's this matter of how we relate to one another—more "family matters." Read paragraph four with me, please:

(PAR. 4) We will express our love for the life we experience together in Christ by faithfully gathering with our church family to strengthen and encourage one another, caring for each other in times of joy and sorrow, and seeking always to maintain the health and growth of this congregation.

There's a story about an actor who was playing the part of Christ in the Passion Play of the Ozarks. As he carried the cross up the hill, a tourist began making fun of him, shouting insults at him.

Finally, the actor had had enough. He threw the cross down, walked over to the tourist, and punched him in the mouth.

After the play ended that day, the director told him, "I know that fellow was being a pain, but you can't do that. You're playing the part of Jesus, and Jesus never retaliated. So don't let anything like that happen again."

The actor promised he wouldn't. But the next day, the heckler was back--and he was even worse than before. This continued until the actor exploded, punching him again.

The director said, "That's it. I've got to fire you. We just can't have you behaving this way while playing the part of Jesus."

But the actor begged, "Please give me one more chance. I really need this job, and I know I can handle it if it happens again." Reluctantly, the director gave him another chance.

The next day, he once again carried the cross up the street; and sure enough, the heckler was back. You could tell the actor was trying to control himself, but it was getting the best of him.

Finally, when he could stand it no longer, he looked at the heckler and said, "Listen, buddy, I've had it. I'll meet you outside...right after the resurrection!"

Hopefully none of us resemble those remarks—but at times, we may.

Listen to how important the unity of the church is for Jesus. Jesus prayed in the Upper Room with His disciples, just before He went out to face the cross. Listen:

John 17:20-21--"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

To paraphrase Jesus' words: 'Father, make them one and keep them that way—in a relationship that reflects the sweet unity we have among us—because, otherwise, nobody's going to believe Me... or them!'

It's all about treating others with the gracious compassion that we've first received from God--as we talked about last Sunday--forgiving each other even as we have been forgiven (Eph. 4:32).

But, again, this is not something we accomplish on our own, by way of our own strength. This is why in the last paragraph of our church covenant we read...together again:

(PAR. 5) Trusting in God's grace to accomplish these things in and through us, we make this covenant together. AMEN.

Good churches are always a work of God's grace. And...we're always a work in progress. We have sins to be forgiven—always—but also great potential to be realized—whether in year one...or year one hundred ninety-five--as God continues to work among us.

This is what Paul is getting at when he asks **(1 Cor. 10:16-17)**—**“Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.**

There it is again. As we share the bread and cup together now, use this sacred time to pray for the unity of this body of Christ and to ask God's blessing on the mission that is ours together.

Pray for our on-going ministry to one another and to our community; and pray for our witness to the world.

Pray that this congregation will always honor Christ and bring joy to all those who ever choose to be part of...**“We, the members of Anderson First Baptist Church...” AMEN.**

As we continue to prepare our hearts to receive the Lord's Supper, let's join together in singing hymn no. _____.