

The God of First John  
1 John 1:5-10; 4:7-12, 16b-21

Rev. Dr. Mark E. Yurs  
Salem United Church of Christ  
November 8, 2020

*God is light* 1 Jn. 1:5; *God is love* 1 Jn. 4:16b

The Book of First John contains some of the most concise statements about God in the New Testament and some of the clearest statements about Christian duty in the New Testament. In keeping with our theme for this fall course of sermons on the God of yesterday and today, I call your attention now only to what 1 John says about God. In keeping with the needs and limitations of an outdoor service, I shall lift up just two attributes of God named in 1 John: God is light and God is love.

*God is light.*

Albert Einstein found light fascinating, mysterious, and compelling. When he was in his late 30s he said, “For the rest of my life I want to reflect on what light is.”<sup>1</sup>

Give your mind to the nature of light and let your imagination roam as to what is suggested by 1 John’s image that God is light. God isn’t literally a light, of course, but there are qualities of light that describe qualities of God.

God shines. That is to say, God goes forth from God’s self. Never in the Bible do we find a God turned inward upon God’s self. God is always reaching out as rays of light beam outward from its source.

God is effective. A single lamp is capable of penetrating the deepest darkness. A lone candle with a flickering flame is enough to stop darkness from overpowering a room. The ability of the flickering flame to defeat the thick darkness is a sign of the weakness of God that is stronger than human strength.

We could go on to speak of light – and therefore of God – as comforting, cheering, healing, gentle, surgical, and stunningly brilliant. These are all factors in our experience of God because they are elements of God’s character.

To say that God is light is to say that God is good and we need not be frightened by anything that is of God.

*God is love.*

First John’s statement that God is love has been called the most famous saying in the New Testament.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Ronald W. Clark, *Einstein: The Life and Times* (New York: Avon Books, 1971, 1984), p. 252.

<sup>2</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1982), p. 549.

Love is certainly the most prominent word in this little book. There are 104 verse in 1 John and some variation of the word *love* appears 45 times in the course of those 104 verses. Nearly half the book speaks of love!

The basic word is *αγαπη* (agape). *Αγαπη* is an undefeatable attitude of good will. It does not begin in something attractive in or appealing about the beloved. It is not a love that is drawn toward the other by virtue of some beautiful or charming or compelling characteristic of the other. It is instead a determination to be loving. There may be a million reasons to stop loving and start despising the other but *αγαπη* goes on loving, *αγαπη* goes on desiring the best even for the most disappointing other. “For God so loved the world,” another book named John says, using the word *αγαπη*, “that he gave his only Son . . .” (Jn. 3:16). The world put that Son on a cross, nailing him to his death, and yet God went on loving. That’s *αγαπη* - - the undefeatable attitude of good will.

This love applies to all God’s character and all God’s activity. The loving God does is not one thing among other things. God is loving through all that God does.<sup>3</sup> God creates in love, God judges in love, God delivers in love, God rules in love, God commands in love, God calls the church into being in love. Love is at the heart of all God does because love is at the heart of what God is. God is love: undefeatable good will toward us and toward all.

Friends this is what is at the center of the universe – the light and the love of God. This is what is over and around us. This is the foundation for all living that can give us stability and hope and purpose. If we look to the light and the love of God we will find all that we need and the answers that we crave and the peace we desire and the high purpose that is worth serving. This is everything. If you will let yourself but see it and give yourself to it your life will be made new and our church will be made strong.

---

<sup>3</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1964, 1988), p. 161.