

## Living Out God's Love

Standing in the grocery checkout line this morning, I couldn't miss the tabloid magazines. You know, those "news" publications that relish sordid and outrageous stories: Prince Harry's wife has taken their newborn son and left Frogmore House! Hollywood stars have split and claim to have found their true love again! Scandalous details about a certain pedophile billionaire who ruined the lives of possibly thousands of children! This is only a brief overview drawn from cover pictures and tantalizing headlines.



**Michael K. Olmsted**

Guess what? From generation to generation, nothing changes in a world that fails to understand the meaning of the key word LOVE, even when it is connected to God. In that world everything attaches to me and what I want – to be happy, comfortable, wealthy, and healthy.

The Apostle John addresses our problem of self-absorption as he calls us to look again at Jesus and understand Jesus' summation of the laws God first gave to Moses in the harshness of Israel's wilderness journey: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40). Now, there is a summation of individual Christian living that can change the individual and the world.

John is calling his generation of Christians back to living out God's grace in the real world – a calling just as critical in our time. Consider how thoroughly John calls us to love in God's power:

- "For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another" (v. 11)
- "We know that we have passed

from death to life because we love one another" (v. 14)

- "We ought to lay down our lives for one another" (v. 16)
- "Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action" (v. 18)
- "This is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he commanded us" (v. 23)

It is hard to miss the progression of love in the unfolding biblical narratives and the clarity of Jesus' actions and words. God's kind of love is powerful and essential, to how we live and whether the world can believe the gospel.

We owe a great deal to the John's writings: gospel, letters, and his revelation. Jesus did not point the world to a temple built by human hands; a legal system that would unlock the gates of heaven; rituals that would result in privilege and prosperity; national bodies that could claim eternal standing; or special powers to a select few.

Jesus loved us in the most graphic way, dying on a cross, casting death aside like a useless garment, and offering us eternal life in God's grace. The Apostle John lived in the unequalled grace of God and referred joyfully to himself as "the one whom Jesus loved" (John 21:7). John wants his readers to live out God's grace, to offer the world the life only God's love can make possible.

Chapters 1-2 of 1 John 1-2 focus on our loving God. Now, chapter 3 calls us to love people. Yes, that is the hardest part. But if you understand John's insistent words to love others, you must first understand that God's love within us makes such living possible. You are never alone. You are not without direction. You are not perfect, but you have experienced God's forgiveness and the possibilities he has placed before you.

My call to preach, at least the stage

at which I was terrified and reluctant, stretched out a year and a half. Actually I later reviewed my life and discovered that God began working on me when I was born. What ultimately won me over was God's love. That same love has shaped me every day. I know what it is to miss an opportunity to be God's presence for someone in need, to react out of fear or anger, to withhold God's love, and to face my failures. But I also know God's love, its forgiveness and the gift of another chance.

God's love shapes me ... or does it? The constant influence of the world makes us reluctant to face ourselves, fatalistic about a world that seems beyond the reach of God's grace, and exhausted by the tragedies that never seem to be resolved. But has not God's love already broken through those distractions and barriers and brought you to Christ?

You are not tasked with converting the world; you are to simply be the presence of Christ in the daily challenges we all face. John says we are to be God's love in human flesh: "Little children, let us love, not in word and speech, but in truth and action" (v. 18). "This is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he commanded us," for "when we obey his commandments we abide in him ... and he abides in us" (vv. 23-24).

The world really has not changed much since John wrote this letter. Oh, we have amazing electronic medical communications, incredible medical knowledge, terrifying destructive powers, and the same possibilities built on fear, greed, and selfishness. But the love and grace of God are just as real and powerful as when John advised those early Christians to "love one another" (v. 11).

You don't have to be perfect. You don't have to know all the answers. You don't have to be ordained or a member of "the true denomination." You simply have to love God and trust in Christ as Savior and source of your life, then ... live out God's love each day.