**1 John 3:18–24** 18Dear children, let us love not only with word or with our tongue, but also in action and truth. 19This is how we know that we are of the truth and how we will set our hearts at rest in his presence: 20If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. 21Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God. 22We also receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commands and do what is pleasing in his sight. 23This then is his command: that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and that we love one another just as he commanded us. 24The one who keeps his commands remains in God and God in him. This is how we know that he remains in us: We know it from the Spirit, whom he has given to us.

I am going to tell you, “What an awesome book we have in 1 John!” It is a relatively short book, comprised of only 5 chapters, with only 115 verses. Of those 115 verses, please note that the word “love” in its various forms occurs some 45 times. Do you want a further breakdown? Chapters 1 and 2 have the word 5 times. Chapter 3 has the word some 8 times. Chapter 4 has the word 27 times and Chapter 5 the last 5 times. As you hear this breakdown, I would think you would kind of get that “love” is an important lesson of this little book.

The book was written by the Apostle John, yes that John who was at the cross. That John who from the crucifixion on, took care of Mary the mother of Jesus. Yes the John of the Gospel of John and the John who wrote 1st, 2nd and 3rd John. John wants you to know something. What John wants you to know he told you clearly in his Gospel! He says in John 20:31 **“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”** He wants you to have eternal life. He wants you to believe in Jesus. Not a pretend believe. Not an almost believe. Not an “I can believe how I want to believe.” He wants you to believe in Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God!

Please grasp that what was just said means something! It is trying to get across to you the full meaning of Jesus the Christ the Son of God that I believe causes John to write the epistle that is before us. Luther says the following regarding this work of 1 John.

*“The first epistle of John is a genuine apostolic epistle and ought to follow right after his gospel. For as in the gospel he promulgates faith, so here he opposes those who boast of faith without works. He teaches in many different ways that works are not absent where faith is…He does this, however, not by harping on the law, as the epistle of James does, but by stimulating us to love even as God has loved us.*

*He also writes vigorously here against the Cerinthians, against the spirit of Antichrist, which was beginning even then to deny that Christ has come in the flesh.*

*Thus the epistle…keeps us in the true middle way, that we become righteous and free from sin through faith; and then, when we are righteous, that we practice good works and love for God’s sake, freely and without seeking anything else.” (LW 35:393)*

Let’s you and I turn our attention to this awesome book on our Christian lives. Our theme will be: **WHAT’S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?**

As you look at this little book the first important lesson we are given about our faith is simple. John begins by reminding us that Jesus is the Christ. He and his fellow apostles walked with, talked with, touched and experienced firsthand this truth. Make no mistake, this book starts by proclaiming Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. Yes, the almighty, all knowing, present everywhere God. So this book is about the impact, the reality of God’s Son, our Lord and Savior.

From there the lesson proceeds. Beginning with chapter 1:5 through chapter 2:14 we are reminded that God is light. Here is that wonderful play concerning light and dark. God is light. He is truth, joy, wisdom and all that is pure and holy. In contrast to God’s light is the darkness of sin and evil. Here are some of the simple in style and yet deep in thought verses from that section. **“God is light. In him there is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him but still walk in the darkness, we are lying and do not put the truth into practice…If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us…if we say we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar, and His Word is not in us…The one who says, ‘I know him,’ but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”**

Now, I want you to know that in this section we are again and again brought to contemplate Jesus as the Savior who has paid for our sin. Yet John, like the other apostle and teachers of Jesus doesn’t want you to think that your sin doesn’t matter. He wants you to grasp that Jesus does have an impact on your life. As you understand these words you realize that no Christian is content to live in sin, to continue in sin or to act like sin is of no account. Here are some to the ways he speaks of that. **“Do not love the world or the things in the world…The world does not know us, because it did not know him…The person who keeps on sinning has not seen him or known him…The one who continues to sin is of the Devil…This is how the children of God and the children of the Devil are obvious: Everyone who does not do what is right is not from God, along with everyone who does not love his brother.”**

There is a valuable lesson here that we must wrestle with. Here is how the same lesson is taught at the end of this book. Chapter 5:16-17 says, **“If anyone see his brother committing a sin that does not result in death, he will ask, and God will give life—to those who commit sin that does not result in death. There is sin that results in death; I am not saying that he should ask about that. All unrighteousness is sin, but there is sin that does not result in death.**

Let me explain this as best I can. Christians have the forgiveness of sins in Jesus. We don’t have the forgiveness of sins when we decide that sin is our right, that we will do our sins, and God will just have to stuff it. That is unbelief and darkness. When as God’s children we sin because of our sinful nature, because we get things wrong and momentarily forget the grace of God in Jesus, we can turn to God in repentance and God is always willing to forgive us our sin. This really just another way of saying “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.” Sin is never a right and privilege of God’s children.

When we deny the reality of sin, the danger of sin, the horror of sin and when we decide that I have a right to this sin or that, that’s when we have a problem with God. Those are sins that lead to death. Sins that we are not sorry for and indulge in though what we are continuously doing is clearly contrary to God’s Word. Paul gives us a verse that lays out the most dangerous of said sins when he writes in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 these words: **“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor drunkards, nor the verbally abusive, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”** Please note there are other passages just like this one, passages pointing out “sin that results in death.”

All this getting soaked in? So, “What’s love got to do with it?”Here is the other side of what John’s little epistle so wonderfully teaches: **“God is light…if we walk in the light, just as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin…If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness…If anyone keeps God’s word, the love of God is truly made complete in him…The one who loves his brother remains in the light, and nothing causes him to stumble…See the kind of love the Father has given us that we should be called the children of God, and that is what we are!...Whoever does what is right is righteous just as Jesus is righteous…This is why the Son of God appeared: to destroy the works of the Devil…This is the message you have heard from the beginning: Love one another…This is how we have come to know love: Jesus laid down his life for us…This is how we know that we are of the truth and how we will set our hearts at rest in his presence: If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Dear Friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God…This then is his command: that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and that we love one another just as he commanded us.”**

Again let me try and help you grasp the total awe of these words. God is love. God in love sent his Son Jesus to be our Savior from sin and to grant us the gift of heaven and eternal life. Jesus is and demonstrates the completeness of God’s love in every way. God the Father and Jesus, in total love, then send the Holy Spirit who calls, gathers and strengthens us in the one true faith. This gift of faith and the working of the Holy Spirit comes to us through the gospel in Word and sacrament. In other words, God’s love is poured upon us and into us through Jesus and the redemption that is ours. All of this is where everything starts for us, God’s love. God gracious, atoning, life-saving love!

This love has an impact on us. We live in God’s light, walk in God’s love, and in that love we love one another. Please note that this love is not so much an emotion as it is an action. I’ll come back to this is a moment. I think we need to think about this love of God and grasp it for ourselves. Honestly, when I think about love I can tell you I go to two places to understand love. The first place to grasp God’s love in what I have just told you. God sent his Son. Jesus lived and then died to pay for our sins. Jesus rose from the dead to draw us in love to the wonder of his redeeming work. Now, because of this love of God, we love.

The next place I go to understand love is 1 Corinthians 13. Here are the words. **“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and know all the mysteries and have all knowledge, and if I have a faith, so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I give up my body that I may be burned but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient. Love is kind. Love does not envy. It does not brag. It is not arrogant. It does not behave indecently. It is not selfish. It is not irritable. It does not keep a record of wrongs. It does not rejoice over unrighteousness but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never comes to an end.”**

Please let all of this sink in. Love is not just a silly emotion, it is what we do, a way of life, it is a specific godly and God pleasing set of actions! Think of the life of Jesus. Just words? Just high sounding philosophy and such. Nope, Jesus’ life is love in action. Living perfect and holy for us. Dying our hell for us. Rising from the dead for us! This is love in action. All this Jesus does for us. He was already God. He was already the all-powerful, all-knowing, present everywhere God and yet he left his exalted throne on high for a manger and a cross! After He demonstrates his total, gracious love for us, He then once again takes up his exalted throne on high to rule over all things, for our good! Jesus didn’t need the cross to be God, we needed the cross to have a Savior!

And so we work at and practice this love of God. Not love the world’s way, but love God’s way. You can do all sorts of great and wonderful things in life but if it is done without the love of God in Christ, it is meaningless! If we are the most generous people, if we are found only doing good deeds, and if we can even move mountains, but it is not of the love of God in Jesus it is nothing. If I can sing gloriously, preach wonderfully, and teach faithfully, but it is not done in love to Jesus, it is worthless, because without Jesus it is the shallow ideas of the world you are hearing about not the wonder and marvel of Jesus Christ, God and Lord!

What’s love got to do with it? Everything! God’s love is our every thing! That genuine love of God in Christ is seen in our fruits of faith as we serve the Lord, as we watch out for each other, as we have a genuine care and concern for the lives and souls of each other. All of this in Jesus. In accord with God’s Word, the revelation of the true love God has given us in His redemptive work. It is our every thing! It is the message of love from start to finish, found and revealed in Jesus. May that light and love of God truly shine in your life! Amen.