

April 30, 2017

(Series) "Christian: It's Not What You Think"

(Today) "Quitters" - 1 John 4:7-11

Have you heard of Anne Rice? She has authored about 30 books and has had 100 million dollars in sales. Maybe she would be best known for the Vampire Chronicles. Some of her books have been made into movies. She has become very wealthy has traveled all around the world and is one of the most popular authors in recent American history. She was brought up in the church but at age 18, as she puts it, she left the church, "violently and totally." However, in her late 50's she came back to faith after years of living as an atheist and began to write for the Lord. She wrote about coming back to faith in a her book, "Called Out of Darkness." Here is what she wrote in that book:

"He (God) knew how everything happened, He knew the disposition of every soul. He wasn't going to let anything happen by accident! Nobody was going to go to hell by mistake. This was His word, all this! He had complete control of it; His justice, His mercy – were not our justice or our mercy. What folly to even imagine such a thing

I didn't have to know how He was going to save the unlettered and the unbaptized, or how He would redeem the conscientious heathen who had never spoken His name. I didn't have to know how my gay friends would find their way to redemption; or how my hardworking secular humanists friends could or would receive the power of His saving Grace. I didn't have to know why good people suffered agony or died in pain. He knew. [Wow!]

And it was *His knowing* that overwhelmed me, *His knowing* that became completely real to me... [This is for some of you this morning; you came to hear Anne preaching to you today]

And why should I remain apart from Him just because I couldn't grasp all this? He could grasp it." - Anne Rice: Out of Darkness: A Spiritual Journey.

She addresses a problem in that quote that we might have struggled with and her answer is, "Hey, your God is too small." Why would I remain separated from God because I can't figure God out?

Wow that is really deep. On July 2010 she quit Christianity... She just quit. She wrote on her Facebook page,

"Today I quit being a Christian. I'm out.... (wait you can't quit, please... those things you wrote were so helpful) I remain committed to Christ as always but not to being 'Christian' or to being part of Christianity."

[Alright wait – you're messing me up. You're going to remain committed to Christ – to Jesus – but not Christianity? Are you allowed to do that?] She continues;

“It’s simply impossible for me to ‘belong’ to this quarrelsome, hostile, disputatious, and deservedly infamous group. [I love Jesus Christ I just don’t like the quarreling, the hostility the disputatious – see you wouldn’t even use that word. Some of you don’t even know what it means that’s how smart she is okay – I had to not only look it up but I had to practice saying it just so I wouldn’t come up here and make a fool of my self – But she says I want to follow Jesus I just don’t want to be a part of whatever that is.

Some of you have felt that way. She’s not done...

“For ten years I’ve tried. I’ve failed. I’m an outsider. My conscience will allow nothing else. ...

[Wait – your conscience will not allow you to be a Christian? Informed by your following of Jesus your conscience will not allow you to be a Christian? I want to say at this point I’m so confused, but we’re not all that confused are we?]

“My faith in Christ is central to my life. My conversion from a pessimistic atheist lost in a world I didn’t understand, to an optimistic Believer in a universe created and sustained a loving God is crucial to me. But following Christ does not mean following His followers. Christ is infinitely more important than Christianity and always will be, no matter what Christianity is, has been, or might become.” - Anne Rice, Facebook 2010

In other words, I know I’ve been redeemed and I do not want to go back to my pessimistic atheist ways but following Christ does not mean hiding behind the word Christian or Christianity to do whatever I want.

In another interview after she wrote this on Facebook she said this...

“My commitment to Christ remains at the heart and center of my life. Transformation in Him is radical and ongoing. That I feel now that I am called to be an outsider for Him, to step away from the words, ‘Christian’ and ‘Christianity’ is something that my conscience demands of me.” - Anne Rice

In other words I can’t continue to follow Jesus the way I understand follow Jesus and associate with anything that has the name Christian or Christianity. Now, at some level and to some degree as uncomfortable as that is to some of you – somewhere along the line you have felt that. And I’ll tell you where you’ve felt it. You are a church go-er and you’ve had a teenage or 20 something child or grandchild come to you fed up with Christianity and your wrestling because you can’t argue with what they bring up. You’re like, “I know, you’re right, they’re disputatious!” You don’t want them to abandon everything you’ve brought them up to believe, but you know where they are coming from.

You felt like Anne Rice because life has been disappointing and the way God was presented to you – He just didn’t do everything others made you believe He was suppose to do, or what your 4th grade Sunday School teacher said. Or because you

sang, "Jesus loves me this I know," but they ain't acting like it. And you don't want to give up Jesus but everything kind of Christian these days is ... you know.

What we discovered last week is that perhaps Anne is not off base. Because here is what we discovered last week; you can let Christian mean anything you want it to mean, because the word Christian is not defined in Scripture. It was a word others used as a derogatory term to describe followers of Jesus but was not used by the followers of Jesus to describe themselves.

Of course over the years we've accepted the title, Christian just like geek started out derogatory until someone put it on the side of a car, made a business out of it, and started making money off the name fixing our computers. But the followers of Jesus had a different name for themselves ... disciples. A much more terrifying word because it is defined in scripture. You can hide behind the word Christian, you can live anyway you want and call yourself a Christian. But disciple that's something different.

Last week we looked at: **John 13:34-35 NIV**

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

I thought it was what you believe. No, people can't see that. They see how you behave. "By this you are Jesus' disciples when you love one another as He has loved you.

Approximately 55 years after Jesus said this John, now an old man; all the other apostles are gone. Tradition says they all died as martyrs for their faith in Jesus. Peter was arrested and taken to Rome and according to tradition was crucified upside down. Paul was beheaded. John is the only one left. He lived through the persecutions in Jerusalem and surrounding areas. He lived through Nero and his terrible persecution of Christians. He saw bloodshed like you can't imagine. And according to tradition he did what Jesus asked him to do and took in Mary the mother of Jesus and took care of her. He survived all that. Then he sits down to write a letter, a sermon really to followers of Jesus Christ. He could write anything he wants, he's John! But here is what he writes:

1 John 4:7-11 NIV

1John 4:7a

Dear friends, [or Dear loved ones] **let us love one another, for love comes from God.** ["Come on John, after all this time are you still holding on to that idea? How has that worked out for you and the guys? They're all dead. How is the church going? Isn't it pretty much in hiding? That's not really a good strategy love one another, I mean Jesus meant well, but that was a long time ago. After all you've seen and heard and experienced ...isn't there something else we should be doing to get this thing going?"]

1 John 4:7b

Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

[In other words the key characteristic , the way you know someone is a God-person, a godly person John says is in how they love]

1 John 4:8a

Whoever does not love does not know God, because ...

[Wait I'm pretty sure church people know God, sure some of them are not very loving but they know God... no, I don't think so. Ah, but I know this woman and she leads a Bible Study, she knows the Bible so well, and she's very committed to her church, sure she's rude and nasty and people don't like to be around her, but I'm sure she knows God she teaches so well. And John would be, no I don't think so. Listen to me I'm John this is still the deal, listen... Whoever does not love does not know God, because ...

[tell us John]

God is love. [Now either John is lying or he's mistaken or this is a really powerful idea]

God is love, let me ask you some questions John, did you see the persecution in Jerusalem, in Rome? How many friends did you lose? I lost count. Now, you know what happened to Peter and Paul. Yeah. We heard Matthew was burned at the stake, I know that too, and God is love. Yeah. How does he know that, let me tell you how he knows that... 1 John 4:9

This is how God **showed** his love among us:

[don't pass this "among us" too quickly, you know what this is? It's John saying I know what Jesus did, I saw what Jesus did, I was there. It is not something I read about, this happened "among us." I will never doubt the love of God because of what I saw.]

1 John 4:9-10

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. (John wrote something like that before - John 3:16) **10** This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an **atoning sacrifice** for our sins.

["us – our" do you know what that means? It means that every person you ever see in this world Jesus gave His life for. That includes your mother-in-law, your daughter-in-law, yes they are an *us* and an *our*; your boss, everyone in this church, people you pass by every day, people you have to deal with every day on the phone or otherwise; store clerks, people who deliver your mail, people who cut you off in traffic...All of them are *us* and *our*. And God sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice. See for John this is not theory, he didn't read it in a book, no, he says, "I saw it happen. And all these years later, I am just as convinced as I ever was that this Jesus is the Son of God who came to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. So...

1 John 4:11

Dear friends, **since God** so loved us, **we also ought** to love one another.

[this little word "ought" is actually a financial term indicating indebtedness, to owe or under obligation to... . There is a debt, debtor relationship in the gospel that you have

to understand, there is a debt, debtor relationship that you have with everyone you meet, there is a debt, debtor relationship between you and God. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we owe it to one another to love. But more specifically, since God loved me I owe it to God to love others.]

Since God loved me I owe it to God to love you and since God loved you, you owe it to God to love me. And every time you don't love me and I'm tempted to treat you the same, I must remember I'm not loving you because you loved me, but I'm loving you because God chose to love me.

There is a sense in which I am so indebted to God and it's not that I'm so indebted to God that if I don't pay Him back something terrible is going to happen to me, no it's way better than that, its, I'm so indebted to God because He did something for me and He doesn't even want me to pay Him back. And I'm so overwhelmed with the love of God and I'm so overwhelmed with what God has done on my behalf and He says, "this is all I ask, you don't have to do anything for me, see I'm God, what I want is for you to love other people.

See I want you and all those people who follow Me, to love people in such a way that people go, 'wow, wow, look how they love.' I want you to love in such a way that everyone in your church wants to live: 'I owe it to God, I owe it to God to love you.' I want you to love in such a way that no one will ever again say that my followers are a, 'quarrelsome, hostile, disputatious, and deservedly infamous group.' I want this to go away. I want this to be erased from the experience of humanity. And the only way for that to happen is to take seriously this new command that I give you love one another as I have loved you."

Maybe I'm wrong but I think that Anne Rice would not have quit if we got - not all the 10 commandments right, but if we just got - this new one commandment Jesus gave us right.

Maybe we all have to quit Christianity, since we don't know what it is anyway, it can be anything you want it to be, and so we should all quit and instead become disciples. Because I don't think many people quit, "wow, they really love me well. Wow, they just accepted me unconditionally. Wow, he just forgave me. Wow, they just don't hold it against me. Wow, they just heard about my past and it seems like it's a non-issue." I don't think people are inclined to quit that.

Can you imagine, like I said last week, if just for a day, or just for week, a month, just for a year no more Christianity, just for a year then we'll get back to our disputatious, quarrelsome, hostile ways. Can you imagine being disciples who love as Jesus loves?

Do you know what would happen, I know because it's happen before, I'll tell you what will happen. People will gather around us and say this, "I don't feel coerced, I feel drawn." - Not Coerced... Drawn. And here's what's strange about being around these Jesus people sometimes I feel Guilty, I feel guilty because I'm not that kind, they are so

kind, so honest, they let you know they messed up before you even know they messed up, maybe I wouldn't even have known they messed up, but they are so honest, who does that, I probably wouldn't and I feel guilty. I look at how they do their relationships and it's better than how I do my relationships and when I'm around these people I feel kind of guilty. But I've never felt condemned (**Not Condemned**). It's the oddest thing. In their marriage they don't fight with each other but they fight together for their marriage. I want that.

See that is how I came to faith, I met a person like that, I met a group like that and I was drawn in.

Don't settle for Christian, don't settle for the brand Christianity, that is what we've done and we've given up something good. John would say, "You have given up your leverage in society when you settled for anything less than love."

Listen guys, this is not passive, Jesus taught this commandment to love and if you want to know what Jesus meant by what Jesus said, look at what Jesus did. Sometimes we have this wimpy image of Jesus, that's not Jesus.

As a child his mother would hide his eyes from the rotting corpse hanging on a cross. He knew what crucifixion was. And He knew there was no way out. He knew there would be an unfair trial. He didn't have to go to Jerusalem, He could have avoided it, but He went, He knew the horror, the suffering, the bloodshed, and He walked right into the jaws of death, you wouldn't have done that.

What would it look like to be honest, what would it look like to love your wife the way Christ loved you, there is actually a verse in the Bible that says to do that you know. What would it look like to love your husband as Christ loves you?

Let's get this right, you choose to love me because Christ loved you, and I'll choose to love you because Christ loved me. Let's just try that. Let's just meditate on that. Let's just focus on that. I think John would say from a perspective we will never have, "I think that is the best opportunity you have, for your family, for your church, for your neighborhood, on your job, in your community. Love one another as Jesus loved you.