

Beloved: A Study of 1, 2, & 3 John

Lesson Six – Be Love

1 John 4:7-21

The section of Scripture we are looking at today is dominated by the concept of love. Although John has touched on this topic previously, it is here that he builds his strongest case for the central place of love in the Christian life. The word “love” occurs 27 times in this passage. No other chapter in the Bible comes close to John’s treatise on love here. John states that demonstrating love is evidence that one is a child of God because “God is love” (1 John 4:8; 16). Therefore, it naturally follows that His children will love one another.

I. The Birthmark of Believers (1 John 4:7-11)

For the Christian, the love of God and the love for our brothers and sisters in Christ is one of the birthmarks that indicates that we belong to Jesus. According to the apostle John, the Christian life is characterized by loving God *and* loving His people.

John writes, “Beloved, let us love one another; for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God” (1 John 4:7). Obviously, having a love for the lost is an important part of the Christian life, but John is not addressing that topic at this time.

In the English language the word “love” carries a multitude of meanings. We love chips and salsa. We love spring weather. We love our spouse and our children. However, the languages of Hebrew in the Old Testament and Greek in the New Testament utilize different words to denote a more accurate definition of love.

Swindoll writes,

Greek culture celebrated *eros*, an intoxicating, impulsive love between men and women. The Greeks also honored *philia*, the warm, noble affection of deep friendship. But *agape* describes an unconditional, selfless love that expects nothing in return for its affections and benevolence...For the apostle John, the Christian life was summed up by living out *agape* for God and for fellow believers—perfectly modeled by Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit (Charles Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, p. 109).

This Christlike, self-sacrificial, others-focused love has transformed John’s life. He cannot get over the fact that Jesus would extend His love to anyone, especially to this former “Son of Thunder” (Mark 3:17). John continues to be stunned by the love of God towards him.

Since God is the source of love and all true love derives from Him, it stands to reason that those who are “born of God” (1 John 4:7) will demonstrate *agape* love because “God is love” (1 John 4:8; 16). God loves unconditionally and sacrificially. Because we have been saved by love and indwelt by love, we must demonstrate the love of God.

If one fails to manifest this decisive characteristic, he or she has every reason to question his or her claim to salvation. According to John, “The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:8; 16). In context, John has already made the point that the true child of God both believes and loves one another. “This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us” (1 John 3:23). Demonstrating the God-kind of love, which includes loving God and the full expression of loving others is characteristic only of true Christians.

Wiersbe explains,

People cannot see God, but they can see God’s children revealing Him in their love for one another and for those in need. This love is not something that we work up; it is the work of the Spirit within (Romans 5:5). God’s love flows from us as we yield to the Spirit. Christians do not love each other because of their good qualities, but in spite of their bad qualities. As we abide in His love, we have no difficulty loving other Christians (Warren Wiersbe, *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines in the New Testament*, p. 775).

In his Gospel John writes, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). The greatest example of *agape love* is the cross of Calvary where God sacrificed His only begotten Son in order to pay redemption’s price for lost humanity. The love of God was made manifest to us when God sent Jesus Christ to be “the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). Romans 5:8 says, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” If God loves us enough to sacrifice Jesus on our behalf, “we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:11). In light of “so great a salvation” (Hebrew 2:3), our natural response should be obedience borne out of gratitude for the Lord’s sacrifice.

II. The Benchmark of Believers (1 John 4:12-15)

Matthew 22:35-39 recounts an exchange between Jesus and a lawyer:

One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

John writes, “No one has seen God at any time” (1 John 4:12). Therefore, He has called us to be His representatives on this earthly platform. Our benchmark, our pattern of living, replete with demonstrating God’s love, presents an image of who God is. The love He has for us is made visible as we love one another. Obviously, because we have been marred by sin, we will have trouble loving perfectly, but there is a big difference between not loving perfectly and not loving at all.

Paul writes “Christ is the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). In His Incarnation “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). After His resurrection, He tasked us with the privilege of being His ambassadors for Christ. From the moment of our conversion and our identification with Christ, we give a lost world the right to look at us and see what Christ is like. Think on that for a while!

III. The Boldness of Believers (1 John 4:16-21)

Many Christians struggle with unresolved issues that keep them stalled in their walk with the Lord. Issues of guilt and shame are often the core issues paralyzing them from moving forward. Or it may be the result of a painful past. Or it could be traced to a father who did not represent God the Father well in the home. Whatever the cause, these obstacles are keeping them from boldly living for the Lord. They often believe God is love, but are not sure that He loves them. They often cannot seem to settle the assurance of their salvation. The devil is wearing them down with his accusations and tormenting them when they sin. Beloved, this is not the life God has planned for you! He wants you to be bold in your faith and confident in His love for you.

In 1 John 4:16 the Bible says, “We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in Him.” We must know the truth and believe it by faith in order to abide in Christ and operate in the supernatural indwelling presence of the Spirit of God.

John goes on to write, “By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgement; because as He is, so also are we in the world” (1 John 4:17). As love is “perfected” (made complete) in us, we will grow in our “confidence” (boldness) in the day of judgment because we are identified with Christ.

One day, all of us will give an account to God (Romans 14:12). For believers, our sins were judged at Calvary, but our service will be evaluated in order to determine our reward in Christ’s Kingdom (1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

Mature love rests in the love of God which caused Him to send His only begotten Son to die for us in order to purchase our salvation. Beloved, God is love and HE LOVES YOU! Jesus says, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My

hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one." Believers have no need to fear the coming of Christ because "perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). Not that we love God perfectly, but that He loves us perfectly. His unconditional sacrificial love for us swallows up all fear!

John presents yet one more observation concerning the love of God. If someone declares their love for God, but hates his brother, he is a liar. "The one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20). Love is the acid test.

As we read in our workbook, "Stamped forever in the annals of history, the greatest sign of love is a blood-stained cross. If we have been impacted by the love of God, others should be impacted by our love for them" (*Beloved: A Study in 1, 2, & 3 John*, p. 175).

Beloved, you are a daughter of the King. Redeemed. Ransomed. Reconciled. You are beloved of the Father, saved by the Son, and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise!