

1 John 4:1-16 • The Bottom Line of Love

Introduction

This is the third time that John raises the subject of love, each time presenting it from a deeper point of view. First he showed that fellowship with God is the proof of love for the brethren (1 Jn. 2:7-11), then how it is further proof of sonship (1 Jn. 3:10-14), and finally here it is taken to the very heart of the matter. Just as a compass cannot help but always point north, so a true Believer will naturally practice love because love is God's nature. This is not a forced response but one's natural response.

¹Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; ³and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. ⁴You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. ⁵They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

⁷Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love

[Read v.1-6]

Q: What are the characteristics of a false spirit?

1. In some way they dispute or refute the Father-Son relationship. (v.2-3)
2. Because they speak in worldly terms they gain the respect of the world. (v.5)
3. What is actually in them is "he who is in the world" (v.4), specifically identified in v.3 as the "spirit of antichrist".

Q: What are the characteristics of a true Believer?

1. They test all things to determine "whether they are from God". (v.1)
2. They confess the Father-Son relationship. (v.2-3)
3. What is in them is God the Holy Spirit. (v.4)
4. When they speak they do not get the attention of the world but those who are likewise inclined toward God.

Q: What does John say is at work which separates the false from the true?

A: "...the spirit of truth and the spirit of error". (v.6)

"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."

— John 17:17

Application: Biblical love without biblical truth is impossible because biblical love is defined by biblical truth. The regenerate Believer has the foundation of "the spirit of truth" whereas those still in the world operate by "the spirit of error".

[Read v.7-8]

Q: What is John's foundational fact which he provides about God?

A: "God is love". (v.8)

Q: What are the other two foundational facts John provides in his writings in order to understand the nature of God?

1. "God is spirit" (Jn. 4:24) This speaks to His essence that He is not flesh and blood and therefore not limited by space and time in the way we are.
2. "God is Light" (1 Jn. 1:5) This speaks of His holy nature, light being the biblical symbol of holiness in direct opposition to darkness as the symbol of sin. It speaks not only of God's nature which cannot sin, but how all sin is exposed before Him.

Q: Does John mean that we can likewise state, "Love is God"?

A: There is an old saying, "Love does not define God, but God defines love". People can say they love each other but that does not qualify such love as holy and acceptable according to God's definition and example. John is providing the insight that what God **does** expresses what God **is**—His holiness is expressed in love.

Point: "God is spirit" and "God is Light"—therefore love that is born out of the

very nature of God must be spiritual and holy and can never be mistaken for what the world calls love.

and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts **through the Holy Spirit** who was given to us.

— Romans 5:5

Q: If true biblical love is a reflection of the character and nature of God Himself, how will it be proven to exist in our life?

A: By the degree to which our character and nature reflect that of God's. In other words, do we live as a new creation born of the Spirit and living exclusively according to His Word, or are we continuing to live the old life as we were before?

Q: Why might it be significant that John says that those “born” of God “KNOW” God? What is the biblical definition of “know”?

A: The biblical definition is much deeper than mere intellectual acquaintance or familiarity. The Bible equates it to the intimate union of a husband and wife as an example that it actually means to be in a very deep, personal relationship with Him.

Q: How did John earlier in this letter define “know” and directly connect it with the issue of love?

A: “...if we keep His commandments...in him the love of God has truly been perfected”. The proof of someone who “knows” is the quality of their faithfulness to the Word.

By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

— 1 John 2:3-6

Application: The proof that someone truly **knows** God is proven by their application of the truth of God's Word to such a degree that they began to take on the character and nature of God and begin to **love** like Him.

⁹By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

[Read v.9-11]

Q: What does “manifested” mean?

A: It describes something that has literally become “clear or obvious” by its having come out into the open. It is the opposite of “to hide” or “to make secret”.

Q: So how did God bring His love out into the open for all to clearly and obviously see it?

A: “He...sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins”. (v.10) It is not merely that He sent His Son to earth, but that His Son was sent to the cross for us.

You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin.

1 John 4:1-16 • The Bottom Line of Love, Page 2 of 5

— 1 John 3:5

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

— Romans 5:8

Q: Was it people's love for God which prompted Him to send His "only begotten Son into the world"?

A: No, it was God's love for us!

Observation: *Babies are not **sent** into the world from some other place but rather **born** into the world. As the perfect man and "Second Adam", Jesus was **born** into the world, but as the eternal and unique Son of God He was **sent** into the world, elegant proof of His deity.*

Q: What are the two purposes herein given for Christ's death on the cross?

1. "...so that we might live through Him". (v.9)
2. "...to be the propitiation for our sins". (v.10)

Q: What is the paradox where life and death are concerned?

A: Christ died that we might have life.

Observation: *Our new life in Christ is so complete that the New Testament tells us that through the cross we live "**through**" Christ, "**for**" Christ, and "**with**" Christ.*

*By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live **through Him**.*

— 1 John 4:9

*and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but **for Him** who died and rose again on their behalf.*

— 2 Corinthians 5:15

*For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together **with Him**.*

— 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10

Q: What does "propitiation" mean?

A: It is something God does to make it possible for men to be forgiven.

Point: *Since God is holy and righteous He must uphold His holy Law, but because He is also "love" he wants to forgive and save sinners. The sacrifice He made at the cross is something we could never accomplish on our own which God did on our behalf to meet the just demands of the holy Law.*

Q: Why is it important to note in these verses that the emphasis is not on Christ's birth but on His death?

A: The "propitiation" was not accomplished by merely sending His Son to earth, but to the cross.

Q: What is therefore supposed to be our ultimate application of what we are supposed to do with the work on the cross on our behalf?

A: Because it is the ultimate expression of God's love for us, we are in turn to produce the ultimate expression we are capable of to "love one another". (v.11)

1 John 4:1-16 • The Bottom Line of Love, Page 3 of 5

Q: How does this define the kind of love we are to practice?

A: We do not love because we are first loved by others but initiate love toward others first.

Q: How might this be a teaching about how we approach and practice the Lord's Supper?

A: If we are truly remembering His death and this ultimate work of love, it should compel us to put love into practice in the life we were given through it. The deeper our understanding of the cross, the greater our love for others.

Q: Is the assertion that "God is love" simply a doctrine of Scripture?

A: It actually an eternal and historical fact demonstrated at Calvary which provided visible proof of this truth of God's Word. It is both real, tangible and provable.

Application: *The proof that someone has truly been transformed by the cross is proven by a new life which increasingly loves more and more in the character and truth of the love Christ expressed on that cross.*

¹²No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. ¹³By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. ¹⁴We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

¹⁵Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶We 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.

[Read v.12-16]

Q: How has the theme of these verses changed from the previous section in regard to what God is doing?

A: The last section was focused on how God sent His Son; this section describes how that now "God abides in us". (v.12) In other words, God did not just do something **for** us, but does something **in** us. We are not just **recipients** of His love but **participants** in His love.

Q: What might this reveal about God's ultimate desire where a personal relationship with Him is concerned?

A: He is not satisfied to simply **tell** us He loves us or to even **show** us He loves us, but desires to **live** in us.

Q: How was this aspect of God's nature actually first revealed in the Old Testament?

A: In the beginning people such as Adam, Enoch, Noah and Abraham were described as people who "walked" with God. But a change took place in the Book of Exodus where He did not simply "walk" with men but "lived" or "dwelt" with them.

"Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them.

— Exodus 25:8

God did not dwell in them individually but within the camp as a whole. Unfortunately, national sin caused God's glory to depart. (1 Sam. 4:21) However, God used Samuel and David to restore the nation spiritually and Solomon to build the Temple, at which point the glory of the Lord dwelled in the land. (1 Ki. 8:1-11) When history repeated itself, they were taken into the Captivity and the Temple destroyed, Ezekiel describing how the glory of the Lord departed from it. (Eze. 8:4; 9:3; 10:4; 11:22-23) Ultimately the glory does not return until it returns in the Person of Jesus the Son of God. (Jn. 1:14) Now John explains He is visible in us!

Q: How is this an extension of the teaching Paul expressed as Jesus being

1 John 4:1-16 • The Bottom Line of Love, Page 4 of 5

“the image of the invisible God”? (Col. 1:15)

A: Jesus was the visible revelation to us of the Father, now we are the visible revelation of the Son. Mankind cannot see God, but they can see Him through us **IF** we love with a biblical love revealing God’s love to a needy world.

Q: *What is obviously the most important word in these verses?*

A: “Abide” is used six times.

Q: *Why is the repeated use of this particular description of our relationship with the Father through Christ so important?*

A: It refers to our personal fellowship with Christ by remaining in oneness with Him to such a degree that no sin comes between us.

Application: *There is a saying that by being “born” of God we have “union” with Christ, but it is only as we trust and obey His Word that we have “communion” with Him and “abide” in Him.*

Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.

— John 14:23

Q: *According to v.13, how is this “abiding” made possible?*

A: By the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Application: *God’s love is **proclaimed** in His Word, **proved** at the cross, **perfected** in the Believer.*

Overall Application

These verses suggest that there are three aspects at work within true Believers as witnesses of the Father through the Son:

- *The Believer is a witness that Jesus Christ is God’s Son. “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.” (1 Jn. 4:15)*
- *The Holy Spirit is a witness in each Believer. “By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.” (1 Jn. 4:13)*
- *The application of love in the Believer witnesses that God is love and that He sent His Son to die for the world. ” We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.” (1 Jn. 4:14)*

The world will not believe that God loves sinners until they see His love at work in us through these inseparable witnesses working in and through us.