



DESERT VIEW BIBLE CHURCH

SERIES: GOSPEL TRUTH FOR LIFE TOGETHER 1 JOHN 4:7-21 •

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MAIN POINT

We show we have experienced God's love by loving others.

INTRODUCTION

When you were growing up, did your family place any expectations on you simply because you were a family member?

What are some central characteristics you share with your family of origin?

In previous generations, children (especially sons) often carried on the family business. For instance, if the father was a carpenter, it was a given that the boys in the family would continue in the family trade of carpentry. Oftentimes, family names became synonymous with a specific trade. For Christians, the “family trade” is love. The apostle John makes the case that love is a valid test of our fellowship and identity

as God's children because "God is love." Love is an attribute of God; it's part of His nature. If we are united with the Father through faith in Jesus Christ, we will share His nature. And since His nature is love, we will be people who demonstrate love.

UNDERSTANDING

READ 1 JOHN 4:7-12.

According to this passage, if someone doesn't love others, what does that say of their relationship with God?

Are you mindful of the fact that God took the initiative in His love for you? If so, how does this truth deepen your love for Him?

Since God loved us first without resignation, how should we extend love to others?

In this passage John referred to the recurring theme to love one another. He made his appeal on the foundational fact that love is from God. The authentic nature of love is easily witnessed in all who God is and all that He does. This type of love is not merely a feeling, but rather, it's the kind of love that acts in the best interest of the other person regardless of his or her behavior.

John asserted that the person who doesn't love doesn't know God. God's very nature is love. All of God's actions are loving actions. It's impossible to come into an authentic relationship with God without being changed into a loving person. It's possible to know a lot of information about God and not love others, but if someone personally knows God in an intimate relationship, he or she will become loving.

There is a dramatic difference between knowing about God and experiencing a personal relationship with Him.

**How have you been the recipient of God's love through one of His children?
How did you respond?**

READ 1 JOHN 4:13-21.

According to John, how can we be sure that we are abiding in God?

According to verse 15, what is the status of someone who confesses that Jesus is the Son of God?

Only those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God are joined to God in fellowship. Those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God are the ones who abide in God, and God abides in them. In the first century, acknowledging Jesus as the Son of God had costly consequences. Such a confession provides evidence that God abides in believers and they in God.

How and why can believers have confidence in the day of judgment?

How does knowing that all humanity will either face eternal life or eternal judgment motivate your desire to share the gospel?

John affirmed that confidence in the day of judgment indicates that the love of believers is perfected. By saying this, John didn't mean that any Christian loves perfectly. Only God loves perfectly. Rather, John meant that as love grows in our life, it will mature and produce certain fruit. That fruit includes confidence in Christ's work on the cross that will save us from eternal judgment. It also includes the love we have for other believers.

Followers of Christ love God and love others, or they are not truly His disciples. Because God first loved us, our wills and affections are transformed in a way that we love other people. When we abide in God through Christ, His Spirit empowers us to practice godly love to all people. To love the way God commands us to, we must abide in Christ.

APPLICATION

If love is the “family business” for all of us who belong to God, what are practical ways you can show love to those around you?

Take a moment to assess where you are spiritually in this season of your life. Are you abiding in Christ to the degree you would like to? If not, what can you do to change that? How can you encourage others in this also?

In light of this study, who do you need to share the truth of the gospel with? What will you do?

PRAYER

Pray and thank God for His love, shown most clearly in the person and work of Jesus. Ask God to help each group member abide in Christ and surrender to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Pray each group member will live with confidence that they are God’s children and share with others that they might also become children of God.

COMMENTARY

1 JOHN 4:7-21

4:7-8. The letter returns to a subject already talked about—love—which comes from God. If we want to be like God, we, too, must love. Love becomes another test of believers. Only those born of God know how to love. They know how because they know God, the only source of love. We must admit that we see remarkable displays of sacrificial love among those who reject Christ. So in what sense can we agree that everyone who loves is born of God? It would be wrong to conclude that anybody who shows love is a child of God, regardless of whether he or she actually believes in Jesus.

This conclusion is possible only if we take this statement out of its context. John has already made the point that the true child of God both loves and believes (3:23). Yet, even those who are not true children of God can love others—sometimes even more fully than many Christians—because we have all been created in the image of God. The capacity to love comes to us as part of divine creation. Yet, true love—love that includes loving God and the full expression of love for others, namely telling them about salvation in Jesus— is characteristic only of true Christians.

Then John flipped the coin over, claiming that anyone who does not show love does not know God. The evidence of this? The nature of God. His very essence is love. Thus, this negative test seems easier to understand. How could someone receive divine life through Jesus, have the indwelling Holy Spirit, and not love? A person saved by love and indwelled with love must love. We may have trouble loving perfectly, but there is a big difference between not loving perfectly and not loving at all.

4:9-10. If we need to love as God loved, we might wonder how God loved. The clear answer appears in 3:16: This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. Verse 9 says the same thing from the Father's perspective. God the Father showed how he loves. He sent his one and only Son, knowing he would be horribly treated and ultimately crucified. This is how God loved. He sacrificed his Son so we might live through him.

This immeasurable gift was in no way a response to humanity's love for God. Quite the opposite. It was initiated by God. We respond to him. Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins. God solved our problem at his expense. He made Jesus our atoning sacrifice. This term (hilasmos) appears only here and in 2:2 (related words are used in Matt. 16:22; Luke 18:13; Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; 8:12; 9:5). This is language of religious sacrifice, used in Greek religion for rites designed to placate the anger of the gods. Theologians argue whether Christ's sacrificial death on the cross should be described as expiation or propitiation. Expiation emphasizes payment of a penalty to remove guilt. Propitiation speaks of appeasing or averting God's wrath.

4:11-12. God set the standard of love for us. Since we are children of God, we should love other people, especially fellow believers, just as God loved us. God has never been seen in his pure form (Exod. 33:20,23; Deut. 4:12; John 1:18; 5:37; 6:46; cf. John 12:45; 14:9; 17:24; 1 John 1:1-3; 4:14). If you want to know what God is like, you can look at what he has done for us and what we should do for one another. This invisible God actually lives in us. The love he has for us is made visible and complete as we love one another. This is the way the world sees God's love, as it is expressed by him through our lives. Only as God's love completes its purpose of reaching out to those he loves—the world (John 3:16)—is his love complete or fulfilled.

Verse 13 looks back to verse 12. How is God's love expressed and made complete through us? The Spirit does it. Our ability to love one another is dependent upon the Spirit whom he has given us. The Spirit lives in us, implants God's love in us, exercises his love through us, and thus ensures us that we live in God.

4:14-16. John's readers probably never saw Jesus in the flesh. False teachers, however, claimed to have made heavenly journeys during which they saw God in heaven. This is impossible. God cannot be seen. How do you deny the claims of these teachers and still say, we have seen? How, if your readers have never seen Jesus, can they testify that God sent his Son to be our Savior? First, John and his fellow apostles saw Jesus in the flesh, but the majority of those who saw Jesus did not join in the testimony. They cried for his crucifixion.

Second, such testimony is based on more than eyewitness. It comes through eyes of faith. Only after the resurrection did this testimony become real for the apostles. They testified to the church. Then the church accepted and repeated their testimony. We do the same.

Third, you do not have to see the earthly Jesus to testify about what God has done through him. You need only hear and believe in the testimony to him from Scripture and from faithful followers. Such testimony is both verbal testimony and God's love exercised through our lives. The impact God has made in other Christians— this is what we have seen. Based on the manifestation of Jesus in the lives of Christians, those who have witnessed it can testify that the Father sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world. That is, God sent Jesus to the cross to pay for our sins so we do not have to suffer the wages sin pays, namely, death.

Testimony about Jesus tells more than what Jesus did— save from sin. It also tells who he is— the Son of God. Again, all this goes against false teachers. They apparently claimed Jesus could not be human, thus could not die on the cross. On the other hand, Scripture claims that anyone who acknowledges this Savior they have seen is a true Christian, living in union with God.

This section concludes by repeating an affirmation made earlier— that God is love and that the person who lives in love lives in God, and God in him. This is the test of true Christianity in the letters of John. We must recognize the basic character of God, rooted in love. We must experience that love in our own relationship with God. Others must experience this God kind of love in their relationships with us. That's why God sent Jesus to die on the cross for our sins.

4:17-18. The judgment seat of Christ received brief mention in 2:28 and now reappears briefly to assure us we can face Christ on that day with confidence. Such confidence comes because we live in love toward God and one another. The person who does not live in love toward his brother may experience shame (2:28). However, if we live in love toward our brothers, we will have confidence when we face Jesus because in this world we are like him. No one who was like Jesus in this world can fear approaching Jesus' judgment seat. Fear expects punishment. One who loves expects to receive love.

Why? Because mature love has no fear. A Christian who fears the judgment seat of Christ shows that God's love has not yet reached maturity (been made perfect) in him. A person who lives in love toward God has nothing to fear on the day of judgment.

4:19-21. God first loved us and made a relationship with him possible. The text drives home its refutation of the antichrists and false prophets. We cannot claim we love

God and then show that we hate our brothers. This only proves one thing: we are liars.

It is difficult to prove whether or not we love God based on our actions toward him because we cannot see him. Love for God is reflected in love for his children, our brothers and sisters, whom we can see. Therefore, God gave us this verifiable command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. Jesus stated the principle in other words: whatever you did not do for one of the least of these you did not do for me (Matt. 25:40).