

Lesson 13: Abiding in God's Love, 1 John 4:7-21

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶ So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. ¹⁷ By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

We come now to one of the most love-saturated passages of Scripture in the entire Bible. Take a moment and count the number of times love is mentioned in any form (Beloved, love, loves, loved) in our passage above. We also find one of the most well-known declarations of the nature of God: God is love (4:8). Indeed, even many unbelievers can quote that, but without understanding what it means that God is love, believers will not be able to live out the love to which we are called. Our focus in this lesson is love, and we have a lot of ground to cover, so let's dive right in.

The Character of Love

If we are to have any discussion of God's love for us and our love for others, we must begin with the character of this love. John tells us that "love is from God" (7), and this is so because "God is love" (8).

- 1.) In much of the church today, and in the secular world, how is the statement that "God is love" used; what do people often mean when they speak of God being love?

If we are to properly understand God in one of his attributes, we must understand (as far as we are able) how all of his attributes work together, for they are inseparable. The Westminster Shorter Catechism defines God in the answer to question 4, "What is God," with, "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." Each and every one of his attributes, therefore, are infinite, eternal, and unchangeable.

2.) How does God define himself? [Ex. 34:6-7; Lev. 11:44a]

3.) Moses was not allowed to see God in all his glory, but Isaiah was given a fuller vision of the LORD in heaven. How does Isaiah describe the LORD, and what is Isaiah's response to seeing him? What was the remedy to his dilemma?[Isaiah 6:1-7]

4.) What must we then conclude about the nature of God's love?

When God loves, his loving is not merely something he does when he isn't exercising wisdom or power, or manifesting his holiness, or rendering justice, or being good, or speaking truth. That "God is love" means that his wisdom is exercised in love, his power is displayed for his loving purposes, because he is holy his love is a holy love, his justice is rendered in and because of his love, his goodness is an expression of love, and his truth is spoken in and because of his love. "Everything that God is and does is coloured by this; all God's actions have this aspect of love in them."¹

The Degree of Love

In our passage we learn that God's love for us is the reason, cause, necessary motive, and origin of the obligation of our love for others (4:7-8, 11, 19, 21). For believers to truly love others with more than a superficial sentiment, we must understand the degree to which God loves us.

5.) How much does God love us? [1 John 4:9-10, John 3:16]

6.) How did Paul express the importance of our knowing how much God loves us? [Rom. 8:35-39; Eph. 3:17-19]

¹ Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Life in Christ: Studies in 1 John*, (Wheaton, IL: 2002), 424.

- 7.) Let's explore the dimensions of God's love:
- a. The height: [Isaiah 57:15; 1 Kings 8:27; Job 22:12; Col. 1:15-19]

 - b. The depth [Romans 3:10-18; Phil. 2:6-8; Matthew 27:46]

 - c. The length [Psalm 103:17; Eph. 1:4-5; Psalm 139:24]

 - d. The breadth [Psalm 33:4-5; Rev. 5:9; 7:9]

The vastness of God's love exceeds the ability of our minds to grasp, and yet John is telling us that this immense love moved the Almighty Creator and Sovereign Ruler of the universe to send his only begotten Son to die for our sins. John then tells us that this love does not leave us unchanged, but it transforms us from the inside out to such a degree that it must be shared and it cannot be hidden.

Love Made Visible

- 8.) How does our love for one another make God visible? [4:11-12; 20-21; 1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:19-22]

- 9.) What were the primary roles of the temple in Old Testament Israel? (*Hang with me here-I promise it will make sense.*) [1 Kings 8:27-30, 38-43; Psalm 26:8; Psalm 122]

- 10.) What is our role now, as the living temple of the Lord? [Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8, 26:15-18]

Solomon built a grand and glorious temple in Jerusalem to display the riches of God's glory and as a geographically-fixed central location for the worship of God. Into the temple were brought the sacrifices of the people, toward the temple the people prayed, and to the temple in Jerusalem the people of Israel made pilgrimage in order to commune with God and participate in worshiping him together with one another. But now, the temple in Jerusalem is gone; there is no longer one, centrally-located, geographically-fixed temple to which we must travel in order to meet with God and worship him. As members of the New Covenant, we who are believers have become living stones in the living temple of God, and we are to go out into all the world and show forth the riches of his grace, sharing the gospel in love with a lost and dying world who, without the love of God are left in the death and darkness of bondage to their sin. "No one has ever seen God," by our love for one another, we make him visible.²

Abiding in Love

As we dig even deeper into our passage, John tells us because God has given us of his Spirit, we can "know that we abide in [God] and he in us" (13). That we abide in him, and he abides in us becomes the repeated refrain for the next several verses (13-16). Here we reach a profound mystery, but not a hidden mystery, for it is a common theme in John's writing.

11.) Why it is necessary that we abide in Christ—what are the results of abiding or not abiding?

First: by analogy, John 15:1-6

Next: in real terms, John 15:7-11

12.) John wasn't the only apostle to write of our abiding in Christ, Paul also wrote of this mysterious spiritual truth, using the phrase, "in Christ." What are some of the benefits he tells us are ours "in Christ"? [Rom. 8:38-39; Eph. 1:3-14; Phil. 4:6-7; Col. 3:3-4]

13.) In his Great High Priestly prayer, what did Jesus ask for us from the Father? [John 17:20-21]

14.) Jesus spoke of more than *our* being *in him*- how does he expand upon this in his prayer?

² I am indebted to Courtney Doctor for this contrast of the Old Testament "Come and see," with the New Covenant "Go and show," which she taught at the PCA Women's One Conference in Chattanooga, TN, October 5-6, 2018.

15.) What are the results of this mutual abiding that Jesus desires? [John 17:22-23]

Walking the Walk

16.) Because “God is love,” certain things are therefore true about those who have been born of him, who abide in him and God in them, and are therefore unified as one as the Father and the Son are one. What are they? [4:7-8, 11-12, 17-19, 21]

17.) Now, looking at your own life, and the brothers and sisters around you, how are *you* to put into practice this one-in-Christ, mutually-abiding-in God love to which *you* are called, and what might this cost you?

We all know that though we are Christians we are not perfect; there are things about all of us that irritate others. *God, forgive us for it.* There are things that should not belong to us, but they are there, and this calls for patience in others, it calls for sympathy, it calls for understanding; and that is what John is pleading for at this point. He is asking these people to do all they can to help one another, to bear with one another, not to be antagonistic, not to become irritated. If you see your brother at fault, be patient with him, pray for him, try to help him, be sorry for him, instead of feeling it is something that is hurting you. See it as something that is hurting him terribly and doing him great harm and robbing him of so much joy in his Christian life.³

Sisters, Christ has called us to come and die to ourselves and live to him by loving one another, and this is hard work. In fact, without the Spirit he has sent us, to sanctify us and make us holy, it is impossible work. But with God, all things are possible. Let us pray for God to work in us, transforming us in love, in Christ, as we attempt the impossible together with him and with one another.

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Phil. 1:9-11)

³ Lloyd-Jones, 422.