

## Love as Christ Loved 1 John 4:7-21

A Salvation Army worker found a homeless woman alone on the street and invited her to come into the chapel for help, but the woman refused to move. The worker assured her: “We love you and want to help you. God loves you. Jesus died for you.” But the woman did not budge.

As if on divine impulse, the Army worker leaned over and kissed the woman on the cheek, taking her into her arms. The woman began to sob, and like a child was led into the chapel, where she ultimately trusted Christ.

“You told me that God loved me,” she said later, “but it wasn’t till you showed me that God loved me that I wanted to be saved.”

The Army worker, like Jesus, did not simply preach the love of God. Jesus loved so much that He proved it by giving His life on the cross. He expects us as His followers to do the same. The scriptures say if we abide in Christ, we will abide in His love. If we abide in His love, we must share this love with others. Whenever we share this love, it is proof in our own hearts that we are abiding in Christ. Therefore our words and our actions are in agreement.

In our scripture the writer of 1 John is helping us to understand the nature of God: “God is spirit” (John 4:24, NASB); “God is light” (1 John 1:5); and “God is love.” None of these is a complete revelation of God, and must be taken together. God is spirit tells of God’s essence. God is not flesh and blood. Being by nature spirit, God is not limited by time and space the way we are. God is light refers to God’s holy nature. God cannot sin because God is holy. Because we have been born into God’s family, we have received God’s holy nature (1 Peter 1:14–16; 2 Peter 1:4). God is love. “Love does not define God, but God defines love.” God’s love is a holy love, and God’s holiness is expressed in love. All that God does

expresses all that God is. Even God's judgments are measured out in love and mercy (Lam. 3:22–23).

Much of what is called “love” in modern society bears no resemblance or relationship to the holy, spiritual love of God. Christian love is a special kind of love. Love that is born out of the very essence of God must be spiritual and holy, because “God is spirit” and “God is light.” This true love is “poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom. 5:5, NASB). Love, therefore, is a valid test of true Christian faith. Since God is love, and we who claim a personal relationship with God must of necessity show God's love in how we live. A child of God has been “born of God,” and therefore shares God's divine nature. Since “God is love,” Christians ought to love one another.

God has communicated His love for us in words and works. First God designed all of creation to meet human needs. Until humans sinned we had on earth a perfect home in which to love and serve God. God's love was also revealed in the way God dealt with the nation of Israel. The Lord did not set His love upon them because they were numerous and powerful. But because the Lord loved them He helped them with a mighty hand (Deut. 7:7–8). But the greatest expression of God's love is in the life and death of His Son. “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8, NASB). It is through Jesus that we know the great love of God. “And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins” (1 John 3:5).

God is love and sent Jesus to bring us life; not just existence but real life. Jesus gives us strength and peace for living. Living with Christ turns mere existence into fullness of life. God is love and sent Jesus to restore our lost relationship with God. God sent Jesus to be the saving sacrifice for sin (verse 10). Jesus, by his life and death, made it possible for us to enter into a new relationship of peace and friendship with God. Jesus bridged the gulf between us and God. God is love and

sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world (verse 14). We humans need to be saved from ourselves; we need to be saved from the habits which have become us chains; we need to be saved from our temptations; we need to be saved from our fears and our anxieties; we need to be saved from our foolishness and mistakes. In every case Jesus offers us salvation; and brings what enables us to face time and to meet eternity.

Knowing who Jesus is and what He has done for us, we must follow His example of service and love. The writer of John tells us to “love one another” (1 John 4:11). This exhortation is a commandment to be obeyed (1 John 4:7), and its basis is the nature of God. “God is love; we know God; therefore, we should love one another.” But the instruction to love one another is presented as a privilege as well as a responsibility: “If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another” (1 John 4:11). We are not saved by loving Christ; we are saved by believing on Christ (John 3:16). But after we realize what He did for us on the cross, our response ought to be to love Him and to love one another.

It is important that we as Christians progress in our understanding of God’s love. To love one another simply out of a sense of duty is good, but to love out of appreciation (rather than obligation) is even better.

We are not to love only in words, but also in deeds and actions. It is easy to attend a worship service, enjoy the singing and fellowship, and go out to live the same life as we did before with no change. True spiritual experience involves the whole person. The mind must understand spiritual truth; the heart must love and appreciate it; and the will must act on it. The deeper we go into the meaning of what God has done for us, the greater will be our love for Christ and the greater our active concern for one another.

The story is told in order to save money, a college drama class purchased only a few scripts of a play and cut them up into the separate parts. The director gave each

player their individual part in order and then started to rehearse the play. But nothing went right. After an hour of missed cues and mangled sequences, the cast gave up.

At that point, the director sat the actors all on the stage and said: “Look, I’m going to read the entire play to you, so don’t any of you say a word.” He read the entire script aloud, and when he was finished, one of the actors said:

“So that’s what it was all about!”

And when they understood the entire story, they were able to fit their parts together and have a successful rehearsal.

When we read 1 John 4, we feel like saying, “So that’s what it’s all about!” Because in it we discover what God had in mind when He devised His great plan of salvation. God’s desire is to live in us. He is not satisfied simply to tell us that He loves us, or even show us that He loves us. God sent Jesus to be “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15), and reveal God to us and the world. But Jesus is no longer here on earth. So now God reveals Himself through the lives of His children – us! Men and women cannot see God, but they can see us. If we abide in Christ, we will love one another, and our love for one another will reveal God’s love to a needy world. God’s love will be experienced in us and then will be expressed through us.

As we spend time in fellowship with Christ we come to love God more and more. We also grow in our love for other Christians, for the lost, and even for our enemies. As we share God’s love with others, we experience more of God’s love ourselves.

“God is love,” then, is not simply a wonderful biblical statement. It is the basis for our relationship with God and with each other. Because God is love, we can love. God’s love is not just past history; it is our present reality. “Love one another” begins as a commandment (1 John 4:7), then it becomes a privilege (1

John 4:11). But it is more than a commandment or a privilege. It is also the thrilling consequence and evidence of our abiding in Christ (1 John 4:12). Loving one another is not something we simply ought to do; it is something we want to do.

Some practical applications grow out of this basic truth. First, the better we know God's love, the easier it will be to live as a Christian. Bible knowledge alone does not take the place of personal experience of God's love.

Helen came home from a retreat greatly excited about what she had learned.

"We had some terrific sessions on how to have personal devotions," she told her sister Joyce. "I plan to have my devotions every single day."

A week later, while Joyce was running the vacuum cleaner, she heard Helen screaming, "Do you have to make all that noise? Don't you know I'm trying to have my devotions?" And the verbal explosion was followed by the slamming of a door.

Helen still had to learn that personal devotions are not an end in themselves. If they do not help us love God and love one another, they are accomplishing little. The Bible is a revelation of God's love; and the better we understand His love, the easier it should be for us to obey God and love others.

A second lesson is that unless we love others, especially those outside the church, our verbal witness to them will be useless. The Gospel message is a message of love. This love was both declared and demonstrated by Jesus Christ. The only way we can effectively win others is to declare the Gospel and demonstrate it in how we live.

"Pastor, the Bible tells us to love our neighbors, but I doubt that anybody could love my neighbors," a member said at the close of a Sunday School lesson. "I've tried to be nice to them, but it just doesn't work."

"Perhaps 'being nice to them' isn't the real answer," the pastor explained. "You know, it's possible to be nice to people with the wrong motive."

“You mean as though you’re trying to buy them off?”

“Something like that. I think you and I had better pray that God will give you a true spiritual love for your neighbors. If you love them in a Christian way, you’ll not be able to do them any damage,” the pastor pointed out.

It took some weeks, but the member grew in her love for her neighbors; and she also found herself growing in her own spiritual life.

“My neighbors haven’t changed a whole lot,” she told the prayer group, “but my attitude toward them has really changed. I used to do things for them to try to win their approval. But now I do things for Jesus’ sake, because He died for them—and it makes all the difference in the world!”

If we love God, we will love one another; and if we love one another, we will grow in our love for God. We are to love as Christ loved because “God is love.”<sup>1 2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Jn 4:7

<sup>2</sup>Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:898

<sup>3</sup> Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Letters of John and Jude*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1976, S. 96