



18. God's love and ours - 1 John 4:7-12

John, having just warned us about the problems of end times and the antichrist, now encourages us that if we are children of God we have God Himself living in us. He now builds on this Truth and says the most profound three words in this letter 'God is Love'.

So Love Himself lives in us, can we just stop long enough to take in this wonderful Truth? Why do we not behave lovingly to everyone we meet and feel so bad about ourselves when this is the Truth? It is simple. Our flesh has not died and wants to have total control and dominance in our lives, so we sin. We have the answer to that as well in **1 John 1:9**. We just repent and move on not taking on guilt and

condemnation but returning to acknowledge Who lives in us and a returning to a right relationship with Him.

John first taught us that there is a requirement to love as we walk in the Light in **1 John 2:10**. Then there is the amazing statement in **1 John 3:1** 'How great is the Love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God'. Now here John goes one step further pointing out that Love is the essence of God Himself and it is the basis of our whole relationship both between God, ourselves and other people. The love John is talking about is 'agape' love as this is the love where someone lays down his life for someone they don't know or like and they certainly do not receive love in return, totally unconditionally. This was the situation when Jesus died on the Cross for us. We were not interested, **Romans 5:8**. God saw our problem and need and asked His Son to leave Heaven and go and lay down His life in such a violent and degrading way for a people who wouldn't give Him the time of day. He then proceeded to woo us back to Himself so we could take advantage of this amazing gift He had paid for on our behalf.

It is God's example of Love that should be our motivation to love, firstly Himself, (**Matthew 22:37**) then ourselves so we can love others, **Matthew 22:39**. God now counts us as His friends (**John 15:15**) no longer His enemies and this happened because of this Love that He is. As we are devoted to Him and turn our hearts to Him and have no other idols in our lives God has promised; 'I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God', **Ezekiel 11:19-20**.

That is God's work in our lives on a daily basis by the power of the Holy Spirit. There is nothing we can do to change ourselves. Our instinct and natural nature is to be selfish, self-focused, unloving, looking after our own interests first. When we are born of God we can even change our disposition as we grow to realise the fantastic Love that God has towards us, 'Therefore if any person is [engrafted] in Christ (the Messiah) he is a new creation (a new creature altogether); the old [previous moral and spiritual condition] has passed away. Behold, the fresh and new has come!' **2 Corinthians 5:17AMP**. This love is recreated in us when we are born again, like Father like daughter! Then we want to show this love to others. So the Holy Spirit's work in us increasingly makes His love shine out of a grateful heart. We just obey His Word and call on His power to do the actions He requires.

Because Love is at the heart of the Christian Gospel, we should see love in all born again people. As they meet together there should be endless compassion, caring, kindness, wise counsel, tolerance, and unity. John is not saying that any person who says they have been 'in love' is a Christian 'born of God and knows God' **1 John 4:7**. He is saying that the love that enables us to say we are the child of God is the same love that has caused him to lay down his own desires for his life and abandon his own plans deciding instead to give everything over to God for His use in whatever way He chooses as He knows best. At the same time God has created us to be like Him so we have free will, so receiving and giving the God kind of love is our choice. This is quite a dichotomy for Christians as we want to love others but find it difficult wondering what is wrong with us, but as we said in a previous lesson Jesus has made it 'the simple life'. Just 'believe in the Name and love', **1 John 3:23**. God says love is keeping His commandments.

So love is not a shallow sentimental response to a situation that is emotional. Love is not the easy path it is the tough path but the path of hope and new life. God has given us His very clear instructions on how to love as He loves. He gave us His Word which is very explicit and clear so all

we have to do is to follow His Word and we will be walking in Love. When we made Jesus Lord of our lives we already started obeying His word even if we didn't realise it. The Love of God was placed in our hearts then by the Holy Spirit, **Romans 5:5**.

This Love is like a seed planted in us but like all seeds it needs to be fed and watered. It needs us to take steps to develop love in our lives. The best way to do this is to become active in obeying everything God tells us to do, speaking words of life over our relationships, and becoming conscious of our love walk. When we see ourselves living the love life and walking in accordance with all Jesus tells us to do, then the love that is hidden in our hearts will be obvious for all to see. If we have a problem loving someone we have to remind ourselves of all God has done to show us love. Our desire to love must come from God Himself and although we may be tired or busy, grumpy or not a 'people person' we need to show Jesus' way and call on His power within us.

Loving the unsaved

Often after we become a child of God ourselves we soon forget what it was like to be blind to the things of eternity. We try and obey God in areas where we feel we have to clean up our act; we can become quite inward looking and lose our compassion for the lost. What do we feel when we see someone selling Big Issue; a drunk sitting on a park bench; someone in the office laughing at dirty jokes; or the girl wearing a very revealing top? Do we avoid them or do we ask the Father to understand His heart for these people. When we go to a party do we gravitate towards the Christians because we feel more comfortable? When we invite people to our own house do we avoid inviting non-Christians as we feel we have nothing in common with them anymore? We reason 'they won't want to hear what I do in my spare time now! They will think I am boring!'

Some of our reaction is because we care about our reputation **Romans 12:16**. We forget that someone once put their reputation on the line to speak to us about Jesus and today we are eternally pleased that they did. If we really shared the heart of our Father we would never lose His desire to see all men saved, **1 Timothy 2:4**.

The prodigal son whom Jesus talks about in **Luke 15:11-24** shows us a perfect picture of the heart of the Father. The son had completely rebelled and dishonoured his father going off to a distant land with his inheritance money which he had taken early. He revelled in every form of debauchery and ended up finding himself penniless, friendless and homeless. When the son hit rock bottom coming to the point of being hungry and cold he returned to his father and found him watching out for him to return. The father saw him in the distance and came running towards him and kissed him. When he saw his father's love, acceptance and forgiveness he was so repentant, acknowledging his sin and unworthiness. The father covered him with the best robe, put the ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.

This is a moving glimpse of us and our Father just as even before the prodigal son had repented, even during those long days when the son was wallowing in sin, his father was looking out for him hoping he was on his way home. His son was constantly on his mind and his heart never stopped loving him. This is the kind of heart that our Father has for all who are lost and that is why He set us up to be drawn to Him and why He wants to use us to be a tool to draw many others to Himself. If we share His heart of love we must keep our spiritual eyes open to those He wants us to love into His Kingdom. What other lips and arms does He have but His loving children?

We do not want to develop the heart of the older brother **Luke 11:25-31** who was so offended when this prodigal came home. He was not pleased to see him and very angry with the father's attitude to his little brother. He was resentful and bitter, jealous and self-righteous as he had done all the work for the father and felt as if he got little thanks. He could not share his father's joy that his brother was alive and back in the family.

It is so important that we keep our hearts soft towards the heart of God enabling us to love all the people He loves. This will enable us to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. We never know who the prostitute we pass on the street may become in the hands of the amazing Creator of the Universe. How about we consider showing Jesus to her by giving her a meal, or even just a smile? She may even be a victim of sex trafficking. Remember the Samaritan woman (**John 4:4-42**) who has encouraged so many people in her village to come to Jesus today and has been written about for all generations.

This God Love should be the foundation of all Church life as this is the strongest tool we have to win the hearts of people in the world. Everyone needs Love.

18. God's love and ours - 1 John 4:7-12 Challenge Questions

Read all the notes on 'God's love and ours' -1 John 4:7-12

1. What do you think is the meaning of 'God is Love'?
2. Can you describe this kind of Love as it is seen in the world today?
3. Have you seen anyone displaying this kind of Love this week? How did it make you feel?
4. Have you shared Love with a non-Christian recently? How?
5. From the story Jesus told of the Prodigal son what do you think would have been the result if the father had given up and stopped watching for his son to come home?
6. Do you think the elder brother would have felt better if the son had never returned? Why?
7. Do you have a story of telling a person about Jesus that you would not naturally spend time with? How was their reaction?

Read the verses 1 John 4:13-18

8. Write in your own words John's potted version of the Gospel written in **1 John 4:13-16**.
9. What does God expect us to do with this information according to **1 John 4:13-14**

10. What do you think about silent believers in the UK? Are they true Christians? What about those in Muslim countries?

11. When can we have confidence before God? Why?

12. What do you think of as 'perfect love'? Is this our love or God's Love?

13. Do you think fear is always a bad thing or can it be a good thing?

14. How do you think Perfect Love casts out fear? Does this work for every fear or only certain ones?

15. Is there any fear that was in your life that you feel you have victory over? Could you share it in order to help someone else?

16. Why do you think the Church is so rarely thought of as a community of love? What practical things can we do to encourage love in our Church?

17. Write one short sentence to sum up what you have learned from this study.

18. **Memory verse:** 'Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear'. **1 John 4:18 NLT**