



Finer Grounds Bible Study

1, 2, & 3 John Lesson 10: 1 John 4:7-21

Read 1 John 4:7-21

As you read, notice God's love for us and how it is shown:

- through His Son (v.9, 10, 14)
- through His desire to give us life (v.9)
- in that He loved us first (v.10)

...and what our response to His love should be:

- to love one another (v.7, 11, 12, 20, 21)
- to confess that Jesus is the Son of God, through word and action (v.15)
- to live and walk in love (v.16)
- to replace fear with love (v.17, 18)
- to love God in return (v.19)

As we look at this group of verses and consider that it follows on from the thoughts from verses 1-6 (which speak about how to test whether one is a false teacher or not), it seems very likely that John is telling his audience that another test of error is whether someone shows love or not. This would be in harmony with scripture, which tells us that love is a characteristic of those who belong to Christ (John 13:35).

The first reason we should love one another is that God is love (4:7-8). Love comes from God (v.7)—literally, it “flows from God” (Vincent's Word Studies). God is the perfect example of love and all true love has Him at its source. He determines what love looks like, not us. To show

love in exactly the way He has expressed love to us is the aim of every Christian. Love is essential to our Christian walk—those who are born of God show others His love. This is a sign that they truly know God.

On the other hand, those that do not love do not know God (v.8). While there may be times we don't show perfect love to our brothers and sisters, we can't let our relationships be characterized by a lack of love. “Loves not” means to keep on being unloving—to persist in hatred.

Loving is the condition of knowing—we can't know Him until we demonstrate His love. Continual, persistent hatred is the path of the one who does not know God. “Knows not God” here means “has no acquaintance with Him” (Robertson). We are enemies of God if we do not steadfastly love our brethren.

To know love is to know God.

Notice how, so far, we have seen knowledge, truth, obedience, and love are linked. This is a very counter-cultural thought.

- **What does this tell us about God?**



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- **What does this tell us about how we need to approach God and His law?**

- **How can we make sure we are continually walking in love?**

If our head knowledge never travels to our heart and changes our actions, we will never truly know God. How can we keep a balance between learning more about God and making sure we put our learning into action?

Read John 4:9-12

The second reason that we should love one another is that God gave His love to us first, before we knew who He was or what He had done for us—before we were even obedient. While we were “hateful and hating one another... the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared” (Titus 3:3-4). The fact that Jesus came at such a time and despite all our sins and shortcomings makes Him a perfect manifestation of God’s love on earth (v.9).

The fact God loved us first says more about God than it does about us (v.10). True love is shown not in that we love Him, but that He loved us first—and sent his “only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him” (v.9). He is the “propitiation” or “sacrifice” for our sins. What a truly amazing God we serve—a God Who

loved us first (See Deuteronomy 7:7-8; John 15:16; Romans 5:8-10; Ephesians 2:4-5; Titus 3:3-5). We can’t even begin to fathom such a love.

And it is this expression of love that should spur us on to action. The fact that God loved us first – and to such an extent as to send His only Son to die—should cause us to want to love just like He does (v.11). “So loved” here is emphatic—He so loved us. So very much. Which makes our obligation greater—“ if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another”. We “ought”—we are “under obligation” and “bound” to love one another. If he loved to such an extent, then we are under obligation to love each other in that same way.

Although no man has seen God, when we love on another as He has loved us first, we become manifestations of His love here on earth and others can get a little taste of what the love of God is like (v.12). If we love one another, His love is “perfected” (made complete; accomplished) in us. Or, as Wesley put it, it “has its full effect in us”. This is God’s purpose for our lives—to become living, moving, walking, talking, mirrors of His perfect love on earth.

What do we learn about the love of God from the way that God loved us first? Consider the verses: Deuteronomy 7:7-8; John 15:16; Romans 5:8-10; Ephesians 2:4-5; Titus 3:3-5



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God's love gives us an obligation to love others in return

- **How can love be love when it creates obligation?**

- **How can we reconcile the two seemingly contradictory forces of obligation and love?**

- **What does this tell us about God's love?**

God has entrusted us with the task of being living examples of His love and light.

- **What does this tell us about God?**

- **What does this tell us about our responsibility?**

- **How will keeping this in mind change the way you interact with those you come into contact with?**

Read 1 John 4:13-16

Next, John gives his audience further proof that they can know for sure that God is with them and that He loves them: He has given us His Spirit (v.13) This could be talking about miraculous gifts—similar to the “unction” we talked about in previous passages (see our notes on 1 John 2:20 for the full discussion).

As Christians, we respond to His love in a number of ways. Firstly, we believe He sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world (v.14). This was an important thing for John's audience to impress in their minds as they fought against the onslaught of false teaching about Christ's identity. While this audience probably hadn't seen Jesus with their eyes as John had (1 John 1:1-4) and we certainly have not, we can also “see” him through faith. The word “have seen” here means that we have “deliberately and steadfastly contemplated” (Vincent); or “look[ed] closely at; (literally or figuratively) perceive[d]” (Strong's). The fact that God sent His Son should be one that we intently look into and think upon deeply—and we have the means to do so with the book He has given us (John 20:31).

The second response John gives is that we give testimony to the fact that He sent His Son (v.14). To “testify” means to “give witness” or “evidence”. This doesn't mean that we are to always be standing on a podium declaring all the things God has done for us. Though there might be a time and a place for that, that is not the only way to give testimony. In fact, by living out the Christian life, we are continually confessing that Jesus is the Son of God (v.15). We are witnesses to Him both through our words and our actions.



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Those who confess God, live in God—and He lives with them (cf. Matthew 10:32).

The love of God is something that we can know for certain that we have (v.16). We know and believe in the love He has for us. “We know” here means that “we have come to know and still know” (Robertson). We are, in fact, living in love as we are living in Christ. God’s love is shown towards us and operates in us—it reaches its full potential when we not only believe in it, but live it out. When we live in love, we live in God—and when we live in God, we live in love.

Notice that the proof that God dwells in us comes from a mixture of what He has done, what we believe, and what we do.

- **What does this say about the teaching that God chooses who will be saved and lost regardless of what they do?**

- **What does this say about how we need to walk?**

- **What are some ways we can “deliberately and steadfastly contemplate” the fact that God sent His Son to earth?**

- **How can we be ready to give testimony about the fact Jesus came to the earth?**

- **What are some ways we can actively confess Jesus is Lord with our life?**

What should the certainty of God’s love change about you?

Read 1 John 4:17-21

We have already seen in this book that we are righteous, children of God, and free from sin. When we realize that we are like God is and not like the world—and we realize that He loves us and He is faithful—this should give us confidence, not fear. This certainty of God’s love needs to change us and give us complete confidence in where we stand. When love between us and God—and us and our fellow Christians—is perfected, we can have boldness in the day of judgment because we know that we love as He loves (v.17) and we know that He loves us (v.16).

Love creates boldness and casts out our fears (v.18). Fear involves the anticipation of torment—but when you truly believe in God’s love and are living in His love (v.16), then we will understand that there is no torment waiting for



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us. Only those who aren't walking in God's love have reason to be afraid of the judgement.

There are a few reasons why we may be afraid of judgement:

- We do not understand God's love.
- We do not fully love God ourselves.
- We need to repent of wrong.

While fear may be an acceptable beginning point for many Christians, as they plunge into the waters of baptism scared of Hell—it is not an acceptable place to stay. Fear will not motivate you forever—and it is not where God wants us. He does not want us held captive by fear. He wants us to move on from being driven by fear to living in love. The one who continues to fear is not made perfect in love (v.18).

John then gives his audience the very reason why they can love at all—because God loved them first (v.19). Some suggest that this text is best rendered: “We love because He first loved us” (see ESV). The statement is general—relating to all the love we give: love comes from God. The reason we love at all is because He loved us first. All love comes from God first and is continually generated by God.

Another requirement of love is that we must show love to our brothers and sisters who are walking with us on earth. John appeals to their logic, asking them a rhetorical question, “How do you think you can really love God—a being you have never seen—if you can't love those you see every day?” (v.20) At the judgement, we will be judged by how we have shown love to those on earth (cf. Matthew 25:34-46; Matthew 10:42; Proverbs 19:17; 1 John 3:17).

If we truly love God, we will love those who He has made in His image. This command comes directly from God Himself (v.21). This is the seriousness of it. And while this commandment isn't new to this epistle or to any follower of Christ—its emphasis shows importance to our Christian walk. Its repetition also shows it's difficulty, perhaps. God inspired John to tell his audience several times to love one another. Didn't they hear him the first time? Yes. And so did we—but how often do we need reminding? How often are we tempted to forget?

What do these verses teach us about the relationship between fear and love?

Considering these verses and those that come before, what do we need to do if we are afraid of Jesus' Coming?

Consider verse 20 in light of the account given in Matthew 25:34-46.

- **What are some of the things mentioned that you could personally work on?**

- **What are some practical ways you can action them?**



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- Are there programs at your local church dealing with any of these things Jesus wants us to do for others? If not, how can you get something started and encourage others to get involved?

Consider the fact that it is easier to love those who we see than one we have never seen.

- What happens to our relationships with our brethren if we only see them on Sunday morning and never go out of our way to get to know them and their needs?

- What are some ways that you can better get to know your brethren?

- What does this mean for your relationship with God? What kind of energy needs to go into cultivating a relationship with Him, if it is easier to love our brethren?
