



Lesson 8 – We Should Love One Another (Part 2)

1 John 4:7-21

God repeatedly, unrelentingly, and emphatically reminds us that He is love. You will never understand who God is if you don't understand His love. The Bible does not just say that God is loving; it says that God is love. Love is central to the character of God. Every action of God flows from His love. God does not need to "balance" His love, showing love today but being upset and short-fused tomorrow. Every choice He makes flows from the fact that He is love.

Throughout the final two-thirds of this chapter, John connects God's love with our need to love. If we truly know God, if we are born of God, and if we are dwelling in God and He in us, then we will love fellow Christians. Those who do not love their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ are demonstrating that they do not really have a relationship with God.

John's repeated emphasis on the need to love others suggests a sad truth: we really struggle to love others. Why do you think it is that loving others is so hard for us?

John had been talking for quite some time about the need to love other Christians (3:11-24). Then he took a brief break to warn about the need to test the spirits (4:1-6). With this passage he returns to the theme of loving other Christians with the

command: “Beloved, let us love one another.” Then from 4:7 all the way through the end of the chapter John will give us at least three reasons why we should love one another. In our study together we will seek to unpack each of these reasons for why we should love one another.

Read through the passage. What reasons do you see John give for why believers ought to love one another?

I. We should love one another because God is the source of love (4:7-11).

This passage presents both a blessing and an obligation. Over and over we are reminded that God loves us, God has shown that love, and that God himself is love. But we are also taught that this means something for His children. Those who have been born of God should love because God Himself loves.

A. God’s love demands our love (7-8).

John makes some simple yet startlingly profound statements here. He tells us that God is love, and that love comes from God. Core to the very character of God is love. John states here as he has throughout the book that people simply cannot be in a right relationship with God without His love impacting them. Love is so important to the character of God that being born of God and knowing God means that we will love because God loves.

Sadly, many believers struggle to believe these bold claims of John. In what ways do we subtly doubt the

love of God? What keeps us from embracing the love of God more fully?

What difference will truly embracing the love of God make in your life?

B. God's love initiates our love (9-11).

As John will later state, "we love because God loves." God's love is an initiating love. Like a flame touching dry wood and setting it ablaze, God's love creates love within us. This means if we are struggling to love, the solution is to be reminded of the great love that God has for us. This love is seen in many ways: the creation, His providence in our lives, but most clearly it is seen in the work of Christ's propitiation on the cross.

Too often, the great truth of God's love on Calvary can become something that no longer moves us to wonder and gratitude. How do we avoid that fate, and what do we do when we realize that has already happened to us?

How can God's example of love shape the way we interact with people every day?

II. We should love one another because love demonstrates the indwelling Spirit (4:12-16).

Loving one another is a sign, not just that we have been born of God and know God, but also that God is currently dwelling in us by His Spirit. At the moment of salvation, God's Spirit comes to dwell within us, and when God's dwells within us He makes a difference. John is here saying that if there is no difference, there is no Spirit.

A. God is abiding in those who love him (12-13, 16b).

The mystery of God dwelling within us as He makes our bodies His temple is a tremendously rich and humbling teaching. But when the invisible God takes up residence, you can tell by the way the person loves. Jesus compares the moving of the invisible Spirit to the moving of the wind earlier in the gospel of John (John 3:8). We might borrow this illustration and expand it a little. If you are standing on the ground and can't feel any wind, but you look up and see giant windmills turning you know there is wind up there even if you can't feel it. Something that is very real is seen even though it is invisible by the effects that it has. People will know that God is real, and that He is real to us, by the way that we love.

How can you as a believer show the love of God to those around you in a way that makes God's presence in your life easily seen by others?

B. God is abiding in those who confess Jesus by faith (14-16).

God's indwelling presence is more than just being nice. John comes back to a theme he has mentioned elsewhere and will develop later: the importance of faith. In other words, John is once again tying together the importance of right belief, specifically about Jesus, with right practice, specifically loving the brothers.

What about people who are generally very kind but don't follow or confess Christ? How would you convince such a person of their need for Jesus?

Why do you think John puts so much weight on confessing that Jesus is the Son of God? Are there other things we must believe?

III. We should love one another because great confidence comes to those who love (4:17-21)

Many Christians live a defeated life, fearful of God's judgment for sins they have committed and continue to commit. John doesn't want believers to have to stand in fear when Christ comes, but rather to have boldness because they are confident their sins have been forgiven and that the love that God has given them has worked itself in their life.

A. Loving others removes the fear of judgment (17-18).

John gives us the end goal of what our love ought to bring about: we should be bold both now and ultimately in the day when we stand before God. The reason for this is because God now sees us as He would see Christ. Our sins have been forgiven, and we have been given a love for others that reflects the life of Jesus while He was on earth.

Verse 18 is perhaps confusing at first. After all, aren't we told that a healthy fear of God is a good thing (cf Proverbs 1:7)? Why then does the author here say that perfect love casts out fear?

How would you reconcile these seemingly incompatible answers?

Two thoughts will help us understand what is going on here. First, there are two slightly different senses of fear being talked about. The fear in 1 John is clarified – this

fear is a fear that God will punish. Those who see God as a mean, heavy-handed deity will fear because they don't understand God's love. The healthy fear of God is the recognition of who He is and a fear of what would happen if we rebelled against Him or ignored His Word.

But the second thought that should be of help to us is that even this fear begins to fade as we come to love God more and more. The more we love God and as a result love other people, the less we need to fear about breaking God's Word. As the life of Christ flows through us and reorients our thinking, our desires, and our will there is less and less of a likelihood that we make boldly sinful choices that would bring the righteous judgment of God upon us. In such a situation, we find that our love for God pushes out fear of God and gives us greater confidence before God.

What would you tell a believer who is constantly living in a dreadful fear of God, perhaps resenting God and not enjoying his or her relationship with God?

B. Loving others shows that we truly love God (19-21).

"I love God, it's just people that I can't stand." This phrase has jokingly been thrown around before, but it's not a joke to John. If you say that you love God but don't love people that you see in front of you, then according to John you don't really love God. In fact, John pulls no punches. If you say you love God but don't love people, you are a liar.

Why does John argue it's impossible to love God and not love other people?

Our spiritual growth, our increasing love for other Christians, and our resulting confidence before God all flows from God's love for us. Like a wilted plant growing in the shade, we must expose ourselves to the blazing sunlight of a clearer understanding of the love of God. Those who understand God's love and who have God dwelling in them will love like God loves. They will love God and will have no choice but to love others as well. As God's love perfects us, matures us, and forms a powerful love within our hearts, we find ourselves increasingly confident in our relationship with God. This is the life that God offers His children and desires them to have. It's the life He offers to you and me.

What do you think are some of the biggest impediments to this kind of living?

How have you seen the principles of this lesson at work in your Christian life over the years?