

SESSION 5

Sure of God's Love



QUESTION 1:

How have you seen love demonstrated lately?

THE POINT

God's love is seen when we love others as He has loved us.

THE PASSAGE

1 John 4:7-13,19-21

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

This may come as no surprise, but since COVID-19 rearranged so many of our schedules, we changed how much time we look at a screen, whether it's a TV, smartphone, laptop, or computer. As a country, we're spending a significant amount of time on these devices.' With that increased usage came an increase in exposure to hateful, divisive rhetoric. Anger, violence, and unrest posted to social media platforms only reflected the anger, violence, and unrest in our communities.

Some people may wonder where God is in all this. Others are tempted to question God's goodness. The presence of human hatred and violence, however, in no way negates God's goodness and love. Moreover, the world's concept of love cannot compare with God's love. I am referring to God's love that was on display when He gave His One and only Son to die on the cross for the sins of the world. We can do nothing to deserve His love, but He loves us anyway. God's love abides forever, and He wants us to be sure of His love for us.

1 John 4:7-10

7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

John had already spoken twice on the theme of love in this epistle (1 John 2:7-11; 3:11-18). Now he was dealing with the topic for the third time. When Scripture addresses a matter even once, it is important, but when God inspired the biblical writers to address a topic repeatedly, we should really sit up and take notice.

Love is the very nature of God. The apostle John wrote, "Love is of God," and love comes from God "for God is love." Love is not just another attribute among many; rather, it is God's very nature from which all other attributes proceed. To this point, John Stott wrote, "It is true that the words *God is love* mean not that loving is 'only one of God's many activities' but rather that '*all* his activity is loving activity' and that, therefore, 'if He judges, He judges in love.'"² This certainly does not mean God condones sin, but in love, He has exposed it and sent His Son to die for sin's penalty.

QUESTION 2:

How do you know God loves you?

Christians should know God loves them because "God sent his only begotten Son into the world" to save them. We have already seen that the origin of love is God. Therefore, Christ is

the manifestation of God's love. God manifested His love for us by sending His Son to pay our sin debt. The greatness of God's love is observed in the value of the gift: God gave "his only begotten Son." The Greek word used here for *only* . . . *Son* is *monogenes*, the same word used to describe Abraham's offering up his only son Isaac (Heb. 11:17).

Abraham's offering of Isaac is an excellent illustration of God's love for us. In Genesis 22, God tested Abraham. He told Abraham to take his only son Isaac, whom Abraham loved, to the land of Moriah and offer him as a burnt offering on the mountain to God. Abraham obeyed. The story reaches its pinnacle when Abraham, who had bound Isaac and laid him on the altar, raised his knife to the sky and was ready to plunge the blade deep into the son he loved. Only then did God's angel call to Abraham, telling him not to harm the boy. Abraham proved his reverent fear of God. Then, in a beautiful display of mercy and grace, God provided a ram to sacrifice in Isaac's place. God, out of His love, provided the sacrifice (Gen. 22:1-19).

God spared Abraham's son, but He did not spare His own Son on the cross. He "sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." The Father willingly gave His Son to die in our place, and Jesus **willingly took the punishment for our sins upon Himself**. Stott stated it well: "He loved us and sent his Son to rescue us, not because we are lovable, but because He is love. So the greatness of His love is seen in the costliness of His self-sacrifice for the wholly undeserving (Rom. 5:7-8). A clearer manifestation of God's love could not be imagined."³

God's children have no reason to be uncertain regarding God's love for them, especially when that love was displayed so clearly on the cross. We can't receive salvation without putting our faith and trust in Christ; we cannot put our trust in Him without knowing what He did for us on the cross; and we can't appreciate what Christ did for us on the cross without also seeing God's sacrificial love for us. Since God loved us in this way, we know He withholds

no good thing from us as His adopted children. You can be sure of God's love.

1 John 4:11-13

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

We have already seen in verse 7 the command to "love one another." John repeated it twice more in verses 11-12. With this call to love comes great responsibility. We are to love others as God has loved us. God has loved us with a changeless, self-sacrificing love. God still loves us in the same way today, and He seeks to display that love through us.

As we saw in verses 8-9, God revealed His love when His Son, Jesus, became the sacrifice for our sins. He took away our sin, but He didn't just take away the bad; He gave to us as well: He gave us life, "that we might live through him" (v. 9). We are to live in Him and through Him, which means we are to allow others to see His love in and through us. To love with God's love gives evidence that we have a relationship with the One who displays His love through us. To state that negatively: "He that loveth not knoweth not God" (v. 8).

Putting God's love on display is to be a continuous, ongoing activity. Admittedly, it's sometimes hard to love, especially when we feel wronged or hurt by someone. In those moments, in our humanity, the last thing we want to do is express forgiveness and extend tangible acts of kindness to that person. But God has commanded us to love, and what God commands, He makes

possible. Furthermore, we are to love, not for our own sake, but for the sake of Christ.

The key to loving others is in loving God. The more we love God, the more of God's love will flow out of us toward others. Picture a garden hose attached to the outdoor faucet of a house. When the faucet is turned on, the water flows. The hose doesn't produce the water; it is only the conduit for the water to flow freely. In ourselves, we might find it difficult to love—especially to love unconditionally, as God loves—but when we are "attached" to Him (dwelling in Christ), His love flows freely through us.

Let's return to that moment in Abraham's life when God called him to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice. Abraham was able and willing to make this great sacrifice because of his love for God. His love (and obedience) for God was greater than his love for his son. Out of that love, Abraham was willing even to give his son of promise to God. His passionate love for God led him to be obedient to an act that we cannot imagine: the sacrifice of his child. God's desire is that we love Him in like manner: We do not physically sacrifice our children, of course, but we surrender all our hopes, dreams, and aspirations to Him—forsaking all to follow Him. We let go of all hate, animosity, or self-centeredness and make the "sacrifice" of **loving even our enemies. We are to spend our lives loving others as He has loved us.**

Although "no man hath seen God," believers reveal God through the way they love one another. The very fact that "we love one another" serves as evidence that "God dwelleth in us." We see a perfection, a completion to love when this happens. We embrace God's love, He comes to live in us, and His love pours out of us as we love others. And the mutual love brothers and sisters in Christ display reveals God's love to the world. We point to Christ, and those around us also have the opportunity to embrace the love of Christ.

Our love for others is proof of God's love in us. Love is the fruit of His indwelling Spirit. God is perfect in His love; He lacks

nothing. But God's "love is perfected" only when that love flows through us. He has chosen to use His people as channels of His love. We are to present ourselves to Him daily as instruments of His self-sacrificing, continual love. Therefore, when we love others, we cooperate with God's redemptive plan for the world so that others can be sure of God's love for them.

QUESTION 3:

How does God's love help us love others?

1 John 4:19-21

19 We love him, because he first loved us.

20 If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

21 And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

John left no gray areas, nor did he sugarcoat his words. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar." A true Christian will not be filled with selfish hatred toward another brother or sister in Christ. To believe otherwise completely contradicts the gospel. A true Christian cannot hate another believer because God's Spirit abides in him. It is an utter impossibility. To claim faith in Christ while harboring hate is a complete insult to the character of God. God is love.

To further stress this truth, John said, "For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" John's logical statements strike to the core of the issue. Of course, some would say it's easier to love God because "he first

loved us." However, John argued just the opposite. Logically, it's easier to show love to people who are visibly present, rather than God, who is an invisible Spirit (John 4:24). A failure to love people whom we can see is a failure to love God whom we cannot see—and a failure to love is hate.

We are to walk in love. Our lives ought to be characterized by daily, tangible acts of kindness. And our acts of loving service must have gospel intent; that is, we serve in order to share Christ's sacrifice that gave us salvation, which was the world's greatest display of love. To love someone is to seek after their highest good. God's love not only seeks to meet needs, but it also aims to meet needs in the name of Christ.

Mark 2:1-12 contains a clear example of loving service with gospel intent. Four men carried a paralyzed man on a mat to meet Jesus, believing Jesus was able to heal the man. But when they arrived, the crowd's size made it impossible for the men to get their friend to Jesus. However, they would not be denied. Their love for their friend compelled them to go the extra mile. They had the man's highest good at heart. The men climbed to the top of the house, removed the roof, and lowered their friend before Jesus. Jesus, who is love, not only healed the man but also forgave his sins. What a beautiful example of tangible acts of kindness! What a glorious example of seeking someone's highest good! We need more of this in the world today.

Love overcomes hate. With so much hate in the world today, it is paramount that Christians love one another. But our love should not stop with other Christians. Love must go out into the world and seek to win the lost to Christ. Christ came in human flesh because He loved us (John 3:16). He gave His life out of love for the lost, and we are to follow His example. We are to love the sinner. We are to love the downcast and broken. We are to love the weak and lonely. We are to love the sick and needy. We are to love "the least of these" (Matt. 25:45).

QUESTION 4

Where do you see evidence of hate on display in our culture?

Commit to love like Christ, who unselfishly gave His life for others. Strive to love like the four men who did whatever it took to get their paralyzed friend to Jesus. Practice love like the Good Samaritan who willingly gave to meet the needs of a stranger (Luke 10:30-35). This kind of love changes the world. And let's help others be sure of God's love for them.

QUESTION 5:

How has our group helped us learn to love better?

ENGAGE

Use the space below to communicate what love looks like to you. Draw a symbol, tell a story, make a list, create a definition, and so on. If time allows, share your creation with others.

LIVE IT OUT

God's love is seen when we love others as He has loved us. Choose one of the following applications:

), Examine your life. Are there people in your life whom you have a difficult time loving? Make a list and begin to pray for them.

I Align your life. Following up on your prayer list, look for ways to demonstrate love by serving those individuals. Write an activity, a time, and a place. Then invite someone to hold you accountable for loving action.

Make a difference in someone's life. Lead out this week in helping your group do something for someone in need. You could put together care packages for the homeless, volunteer at a local food pantry, or find a family in need and minister to them.



END NOTES

1. "COVID-19: Screen Time Spikes to Over 13 Hours per Day According to Eyesafe Nielsen Estimates: eyesafe, eyesafescornicovid-19-screen-time-spike-to-over-13-hours-per-dayt
2. John R.W. Stott. *Tyndale New Testament Commentary: The Letters of John* (Dovers Grove: IVP Academic, 1988), 161.
3. Ibid.