

**Real Love
God is Love
1 John 4:7 – 16**

1 John 4:7 Dear friends, we should love each other, because love comes from God. Everyone who loves has become God's child and knows God.

8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

9 This is how God showed his love to us: He sent his one and only Son into the world so that we could have life through him.

10 This is what real love is: It is not our love for God; it is God's love for us in sending his Son to be the way to take away our sins.

11 Dear friends, if God loved us that much we also should love each other.

12 No one has ever seen God, but if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is made perfect in us.

13 We know that we live in God and he lives in us, because he gave us his Spirit.

14 We have seen and can testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God has God living inside, and that person lives in God.

16 And so we know the love that God has for us, and we trust that love. God is love. Those who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.

Big Idea – Real love comes from God because God is love.

3 times John tells us to love one another

3 foundational facts about

What God is:

"God is spirit" (John 4:24)

His essence; He is not flesh and blood. Jesus Christ now has a glorified body in heaven – our bodies in heaven will be just like His. But as a spirit, God is not limited by time and space as we are.

"God is light" (1 John 1:5)

In the Bible, light is a symbol of holiness and darkness is a symbol of sin (John 3:18-21; 1 John 1:5-10).

God cannot sin because He is holy. Because we have been born into His family, we have received His holy nature (1 Peter 1:14-16; 2 Peter 1:4).

"God is love." (1 John 4:8, 16) - does not mean that "love is God."

- the fact that two people "love each other" does not mean that their love is necessarily holy. It is accurate to say that "love does not define God, but God defines love."

What God is determines what we ought to be.

"As He is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4:17).

The fact that Christians love one another is evidence of their fellowship with God and their sonship from God, and it is also evidence that they know God.

Their experience with God is not simply a once-for-all crisis; it is a daily experience of getting to know Him better and better. True theology (the study of God) is not a dry, impractical course in doctrine—it is an exciting day-by-day experience that makes us Christlike!

A person who claims he knows God and is in union with Him must be personally affected by this relationship. A Christian ought to become what God is, and "God is love."

What God Did: "He Sent His Son" (1 John 4:9-11)

Because God is love, He must communicate—not only in words but in deeds. True love is never static or inactive.

God reveals His love to mankind in many ways:

God's love revealed in the way He dealt with the nation of Israel.

"The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people. But because the Lord loved you ...the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand" (Deut. 7:7-8).

The greatest expression of God's love is in the death of His Son.

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

The word "manifested" means "to come out in the open, to be made public." It is the opposite of "to hide, to make secret." Under the Old Covenant, God was hidden behind the shadows of ritual and ceremony (Hebrews 10:1); but in Jesus Christ "the life was manifested" (1 John 1:2). "He that hath seen Me," said Jesus, "hath seen the Father" (John 14:9).

Why was Jesus Christ manifested?

"And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins" (1 John 3:5). "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

Where did Jesus take away our sins and destroy (render inoperative) the works of the devil? At the cross! God showed His love at the cross when He gave His Son as a sacrifice there for our sins.

This is the only place in the epistle where Jesus is called God's only-begotten Son. The title is used in John's Gospel (John 1:14). It means "unique, the only one of its kind."

The fact that God sent His Son into the world is one evidence of the deity of Jesus Christ. Babies are not sent into the world from some other place; they are born into the world. As the perfect Man, Jesus was born into the world, but as the eternal Son, He was sent into the world.

But the sending of Christ into the world, and His death on the cross, were not prompted by man's love for God. They were prompted by His love for man. The world's attitude toward God is anything but love!

2 purposes are given for Christ's death on the cross:

that we might live through Him (1 John 4:9)

that He might be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10). His death was not an accident; it was an appointment. He did not die as a weak martyr, but as a mighty conqueror.

Jesus Christ died that we might live "through Him" (1 John 4:9), "for Him" (2 Cor. 5:15), and "with Him" (1 Thes. 5:9-10). A sinner's desperate need is for life, because he is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1).

It is something of a paradox that Christ had to die so that we may live!

The death of Christ is described as a "propitiation." Note that propitiation does not mean that men must do something to appease God or to placate His anger.

Propitiation is something God does to make it possible for men to be forgiven.

Note that the emphasis is on the death of Christ, not on His birth. The fact that Jesus was "made flesh" (John 1:14) is certainly an evidence of God's grace and love, but the fact that He was "made sin" (2 Cor. 5:21) is underscored for us. The example of Christ, the teachings of Christ, the whole earthly life of Christ, find their true meaning and fulfillment in the cross.

For the second time, believers are commanded to "love one another" (1 John 4:11). This 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."

The command 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 normal response ought to be to love Him and to love one another.

It is important that Christians progress in their understanding of 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.

What God Is Doing: "God Abides in Us" (1 John 4:12-16)

God does something in us!

To begin with, 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.

In the beginning, God had fellowship with man in a personal, direct way (Gen. 3:8), but sin broke that fellowship. It was necessary for God to shed the blood of animals to cover the sins of Adam and Eve so that they might come back into His fellowship.

One of the key words in the Book of Genesis is **walked**. God walked with men, and men walked with God. Enoch (Gen. 5:22), Noah (Gen. 6:9), and Abraham walked with God (Gen. 17:1; 24:40).

But by the time of the events recorded in Exodus, a change had taken place: God did not simply walk with men, He lived, or dwelt, with them. God's commandment to Israel was, "And let them make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them" (Ex. 25:8).

The first of those sanctuaries was the tabernacle. When Moses dedicated it, the glory of God came down and moved into the tent (Ex. 40:33-35). God dwelt in the camp, but He did not dwell in the bodies of the individual Israelites.

Unfortunately, the nation sinned and God's glory departed (1 Sam. 4:21). But God used Samuel and David to restore the nation; and Solomon built God a magnificent temple. When the temple was dedicated, once again the glory of God came to dwell in the land (1 Kings 8:1-11).

But history repeated itself, and Israel disobeyed God and was taken into Captivity. The gorgeous temple was destroyed. One of the prophets of the Captivity, Ezekiel, saw the glory of God depart from it (Ezek. 8:4; 9:3; 10:4; 11:22-23).

Did the glory ever return? Yes—in the Person of God's Son, Jesus Christ! "And the Word became flesh, and lived among us, and we beheld His glory" (John 1:14, lit.).

But wicked men nailed His body to a cross. They crucified "the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8). All this was part of God's plan, and Christ arose from the dead, returned to heaven, and sent His Holy Spirit to dwell in men.

The glory of God now lives in the bodies of God's children. (1 Cor. 6:19) Jesus has promised that the Spirit will abide in us forever (John 14:16).

With this background, we can better understand what 1 John 4:12-16 is saying to us.

God is invisible (1 Tim. 1:17), and no man can see Him in His essence. Jesus is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15). By taking on Himself a human body, Jesus was able to reveal God to us. But Jesus is no longer here on earth. How does God reveal Himself to the world?

He reveals Himself through the lives of His children.

Matthew 5:16 "let your light shine before men that they may see your works and glorify your Father in heaven"

Men 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.

That important little word abide (or dwell) is used six times in 1 John 4:12-16.

It refers to our personal fellowship with Jesus Christ. To abide in Christ means to remain in spiritual oneness with Him, so that no sin comes between us.

Because we are "born of God," we have union with Christ; but it is only as we trust Him and obey His commandments that we have communion with Him. Much as a faithful husband and wife "abide in love" though they may be separated by miles, so a believer abides in God's love. This abiding is made possible by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (1 John 4:13).

Imagine the wonder and the privilege of having God abide in you! The Old Testament Israelite would look with wonder at the tabernacle or temple, because the presence of God was in that building. No man would dare to enter the holy of holies, where God was enthroned in glory! But we have God's Spirit living in us!

God's love is proclaimed in the Word ("God is love") and proved at the cross. But here we have something deeper: God's love is perfected in the believer.

Fantastic as it may seem, God's love is not made perfect in angels, but in sinners saved by His grace. We Christians are now the tabernacles and temples in which God dwells. He reveals His love through us.

Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, famous British preacher, had five sons, all of whom became ministers of the Gospel. One day a visitor in their home dared to ask a personal question: "Which of you six is the best preacher?"

Their united answer was, "Mother!"

Of course, Mrs. Campbell Morgan had never preached a formal sermon in a church; but her life was a constant sermon on the love of God.

The life of a Christian who abides in God's love is a powerful witness for God in the world. Men cannot see God, but they can see His love moving us to deeds of helpfulness and kindness.

Three different witnesses are suggested in these verses:

1. The witness of the believer that Jesus Christ is God's Son (1 John 4:15);
2. the witness in the believer by the Spirit (1 John 4:13); and
3. the witness through the believer that God is love and that He sent His Son to die for the world (1 John 4:14).

These witnesses cannot be separated. The world will not believe that God loves sinners until they see His love at work in His children's lives.

Jesus did not simply preach the love of God; He proved it by giving His life on the cross. He expects His followers to do likewise. 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. In other words, there is no separation between a Christian's inner life and his outer life.

Abiding in God's love produces two wonderful spiritual benefits in the life of a believer:

1. He grows in knowledge, and
2. He grows in faith (1 John 4:16).

The more we love God, the more we understand the love of God. And the more we understand His love, the easier it is for us to trust Him. After all, when you know someone intimately and love him sincerely, you have no problem putting your confidence in him.

A man standing in the greeting card section of a store was having trouble picking out a card. The clerk asked if she could help, and he said:

"Well, it's our fortieth wedding anniversary, but I can't find a card that says what I want to say. You know, forty years ago it wouldn't have been any problem picking out a card, because back then I thought I knew what love was. But we love each other so much more today, I just can't find a card that says it!"

Some practical applications grow out of this basic truth:

1. 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. In fact, it can be a dangerous substitute if we are not careful.

Helen came home from a youth retreat greatly enthused over 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 Him and love others.

2. unless we love the lost, 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. Too much "witnessing" today is a mere mouthing of words. People need an expression of love.

One reason why God permits the world to hate Christians is so that Christians may return love for the world's hatred.

"Blessed are you when men revile you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me.... But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt 5:11, 44)

"Pastor, the Bible tells us to love our neighbors, but I doubt that anybody could love my neighbors," Mrs. Barton 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 Mrs. Barton 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!"

In this paragraph of his letter, John has taken us to the very foundation of Christian love. But he still has more to teach us. In the next section, he deals with our own personal love for God and how God perfects that love in us.

These two aspects of Christian love cannot be separated from one another: if we love God, we will love one another; and if we love one another, we will grow in our love for God.

And both statements are true because "God is love."