



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

1 JOHN 4:7-11 – “FOR GOD IS LOVE!”

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Is it possible for a Christian to truly be a believer while refusing to love someone who God loves and for whom Christ died? Saving faith brings us into union with Jesus Christ, the God Who is love. Likeness is the evidence of belonging. This is something we must ponder often. For the one who does not love cannot be assured he or she is of the family of God.¹

Our world encourages self-satisfaction and not sacrifice. But a heart willing to sacrifice on behalf of our brothers and sisters in Christ is the standard of love that we are obligated to give. That's what love really is.

I. 1 JOHN 4:7-11: “FOR GOD IS LOVE!”

(7) “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.” (8) “The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” (9) “By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.” (10) “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (11) “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.” 1 John 4:7-11

John has repeatedly talked about love in this letter and he once again goes back to his favorite subject in these next verses of 1 John 4:7-11, with greater depth and breadth. John wrote about love in 1 John 3:16-18 to show the nature of this love that God has and all believers are to possess as well. Now John writes to inspire us to love because of Who God is.

This portion of Scripture is the most highly concentrated section on the theme of love in all of God's Word if we include 1 John 4:7-21. John loves to talk about love. It was Christ's love for him that radically transformed his life and he was never the same. Think back to how John wrote in his Gospel account. John never used his name to refer to himself. When Jesus was on the cross, Christ looked down at His mother. Standing by Mary was the “disciple whom He loved” referring to John, and Jesus asked John to take care of his mother. (John 19:25-27) John always referred to himself in his Gospel... *as the disciple whom Jesus loved.* It was as though any opportunity to refer to himself was a chance to celebrate his intimacy with Christ.

Indeed, John's pride was changed to humility as he recognized the great love his Lord and Savior had for him as a sinner, willing to die for him on the cross to pay for his sin. His character was transformed by Jesus; as a fisherman to a fisher of men. He was an eyewitness to Christ's death and resurrection. It was Peter and John who raced to the tomb,

with the younger John arriving first to find it empty. Their Lord had risen from the grave just as He said! (John 20)

God transformed John. His zeal for the Lord, his love for Christ and his passion for the truth of the gospel only grew. His life would never be the same because he was the disciple whom Jesus loved. John remained faithful and was always overwhelmed by the love His Lord had for him. He stayed on task, preparing the next generation to carry the torch for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So what is this love that changed John which he wrote so much about? Christianity is the only religion that speaks of a living God Who is love and Who personally loves His creation. But there is a great difference between how people today define God's love and how the Apostle John describes it for us.² What does it mean that God is love? We will begin there with our study and examine this beautiful phrase found in 1 John 4:8.

A. “FOR GOD IS LOVE...” - 1 JOHN 4:8

(7) “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.” (8) “The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” 1 John 4:7-8

John writes one of the greatest Biblical statements here about the nature of God. John isn't talking about a quality that God possesses. God's essence is Who God is. This is an aspect of the nature of God. That God is love deals with His character and love and stresses the personality of God to the fullest.³

This statement that “*God is love*” (4:8, 4:16) is probably the high water mark of the Epistle. This verse is almost beyond human comprehension. This statement is most profound for it regards love as more than a gift, more than a characteristic or attribute. In the deepest sense, love is linked to the nature of God.⁴

It is most important to notice the structure of this sentence. First you will see there are two nouns, “*God*” and “*love*”. There is a definite article, “*for*” which precedes God in the sentence. Therefore, the nouns in the phrase “*for God is love*” are not interchangeable by design. To make them reversible would be incorrect grammar and thus offer a basis for pantheism. And, yes John has said “*love is of God*” (4:7) but that is the opposite of saying that love is God.⁵ And that happens.

John wrote another truth regarding the nature of God in this Epistle. 1 John 1:5 says, “*And this is the message we have heard from*

BIBLE STUDIES

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Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." God is absolute perfect in truth and holiness. God possesses absolute moral perfection. This last phrase highlights God's complete perfect nature. John uses the contrast of light to darkness. Light represents truth and purity as we have seen. Darkness refers to error, ignorance and evil. John uses light and dark to symbolize righteousness and sin. And light refers to righteousness, purity without sin or evil. John writes that in God "there is no darkness at all." Literally it would read, "and darkness in Him not is, not one bit." In God's Being there is not one trace of darkness. It carries the idea of purity and holiness with no evil but all good; no error, but all truth. The holiness of God defines His nature. "God is light". And thus John also highlights for us that "God is love".

God is by nature love. Because He is love, He gets to define love for us...love does not define Him. We must be very careful. People try to impose on God a human view of love, but God transcends any human perspective or limitation.⁶

And we must keep in mind, because God is love, His essence is love, it doesn't mean He tolerates everything. He created love, He is love and He alone defines love for us. We don't get to define love...He does. And God's ultimate expression of love was this: "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 4:10)

Just think about that for a bit. Love finds its ultimate explanation in our Lord Jesus Christ: that means in Christ's Incarnation, crucifixion, death and resurrection three days later. 1 John 3:16 says "By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us." Is there any question why John made clear these truths about Christ in 1 John 4:1-6? Is there any confusion as to why it was critical to John that we are not deceived about the truth regarding Jesus? Because Christ is God's ultimate expression of love for us. We can't be confused or deceived about Him.

The contemporary concept of a loving God, a God Whose very essence is love, is that He cannot and will not judge anyone for anything and tolerates most everything. It means that God is tolerant of all beliefs, perspectives and lifestyles.

God is the source of all love for love is from God. This is a worldly view of "love" but not God's love. Christians are scolded for advocating that love and moral constraints go hand in hand. We are told that the loving thing is to embrace all lifestyles. Yet such accusations reflect a dark and deceived world. Christian love has its limits, and those limits are set by God Himself Who is love and defines it.⁷

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came in the flesh, died on the cross bearing the penalty of sin and satisfying the wrath of God, rose from the dead victorious over sin and death, ascended into heaven where He sits at the right hand of God the Father. John was an eyewitness to these truths. This is the good news of salvation offered to all who acknowledge their sin before a holy and righteous God and trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation resulting in eternal life. That is love.

It would be these very truths that were coming under assault by false teachers with lofty speculations, causing true believers to question the validity of their faith. John could testify to the churches under his care that they could know with certainty the truths of their faith in Christ. And so he writes with the love and tenderness of a pastor, giving them assurance. He takes up his pen to defend the faith in this letter. He was authoritative and clear, yet loving. His love for the brethren didn't lead him down a road of sentimentality and tolerance, but it was a love that took him down the road of truth. Telling the truth is the most loving thing you could ever do. John loved the truth, he loved the God of truth. He loved Jesus Christ so much that he spent his life telling people, lovingly, the absolute gospel truth.³

He writes with tenderness, love and affirmation, yet you hear the rumble of thunder in the background as he writes about deceivers and those against Christ. It is with love and thunder that he writes to protect his children, his family from deception that could darken their understanding if not warned. And so, John records, "for God is love" and we will spend a few weeks broadening our understanding of this truth and what love really means.

¹ Hamilton, Ian, *Let's Study the Letters of John*. The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, UK, 2008. Pg. 47.

² O'Donnell, Douglas Sean, *Reformed Expository Commentary: 1-3 John*. P&R Publishing Company: Phillipsburg, NJ, 2015. Pg. 130-131.

³ Hiebert, D. Edmond, *The Epistles of John: An Expositional Commentary*. Bob Jones University Press: Greenville, SC, 1991. Pg.198.

⁴ Boice, James Montgomery, *An Expositional Commentary: The Epistles of John*. Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI, 1979. Pg. 113.

⁵ Hiebert, D. Edmond, *The Epistles of John: An Expositional Commentary*. Bob Jones University Press: Greenville, SC, 1991. Pg. 199.

⁶ MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary Series on 1-3 John*. Moody Press: Chicago, IL, 2007. Pg. 166.

⁷ O'Donnell, Douglas Sean, *Reformed Expository Commentary: 1-3 John*. P&R Publishing Company: Phillipsburg, NJ, 2015. Pg. 132-133.