



# CAPITOL COMMISSION™

## God is Love (1 John 4:8, 16)

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### **Weekly Bible Study Schedule**

- **Tuesday, February 11, 7 AM in HHR #5**  
-Breakfast Provided
- **Tuesday, February 11, 8:30 PM in Office #225**  
(Sen. Wayne Wallingford's office)

We say we “love our children”, “love pizza”, “love golf”, “love to fish”, “make love not war”, “show me some love”, “I love you”.

We sing “Love is a many splendored thing”; “Love me tender, love me true”; “I can’t help falling in love with you”; “I can’t stop loving you”; “What kind of fool am I who never fell in love”; “The nighttime is the right time to be with the one you love”; “Today, I started loving you again”; “My hair’s still curly and my eyes are still blue so why don’t you love me like you used to do”; “As long as I have love, I know I can make it”; “Baby I was wrong for ever letting you down but that was the day before love came to town”.

The word “love” is used in so many ways in the English language. Thus, when the Scripture says “God is love”, much clarification is needed. To attempt to define and view “God’s love” outside of Scripture is truly an insult to greatness and beauty of God’s incredible love and His character.

Before we tackle the next passage in our study series in 1 John, we need to stop and examine the short phrase “God is love.”

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture reveals to mankind a wonderful portrait of the majestic and glorious God who created the universe. A portion of this beautiful tapestry is the love of God that is presented throughout the pages of the Bible:

*1 John 3:1 See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are.*

*Deuteronomy 10:15 Yet on your fathers did the LORD set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, even you above all peoples, as it is this day.*

*Micah 7:18 Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in unchanging love.*

At the conclusion of each verse in Psalm 136 is the refrain, “For His lovingkindness is everlasting.” Of which Charles Spurgeon wrote “We shall have this repeated in every verse of this song, but not once too often. It is the sweetest stanza that a man can sing.”<sup>1</sup>

The images in the Bible also beautifully portray the love of God in relationship with His creatures. God is seen as a father (Hosea 11:1; 1 Corinthians 1:3; Galatians 1:1), a mother (Deuteronomy 32:18; Isaiah 49:14-15; 66:13), a husband (Hosea 3:1-3; Ephesians 5:22-32); a friend (Jeremiah 3:4; James 2:2) a shepherd (Psalm 23; Luke 15; John 10) and a redeemer, savior, the deliverer of His people (Hosea 3; Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 1:18-19).

Twice in 1 John 4, the Apostle wrote:

*1 John 4:8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*

*1 John 4:16 We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.*

“God is love” is the foundation upon which John’s command to love one another stands. This short phrase is packed with glorious and profound truths which need to be opened. Unfortunately, this phrase has also been used to distort God’s character to make Him more palatable to our modern day views.

A disclaimer before we proceed: This study will not be able to answer all the questions surrounding God’s love: “Does God love all people the same?” “Does God hate some people?” “How can God be ‘love’ while evil prevails in our world?” “How can a loving God allow some tragedies to fall on people—especially “His” people?” These are beyond the scope of this study (I only have three to four pages). But these questions cannot be properly addressed until a correct understanding of God, His love, and His attributes are understood from a biblical perspective.

### CAPITOL COMMISSION BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS, LOBBYISTS & STAFF: TUESDAYS @ 7AM, HEARING ROOM #5

LEGISLATORS, LOBBYISTS & STAFF: TUESDAYS @ 8:30PM, OFFICE #225

PROCLAIMING THE GREATNESS AND GLORY OF GOD IN THE MISSOURI STATE CAPITOL

# Missouri

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### GOD IS LOVE: DEFINED

Jack Cottrell defined God's love as "his self-giving affection for his image-bearing creatures and his unselfish concern for their well being, that leads him to act on their behalf and for their happiness and welfare."<sup>2</sup> R.A. Torrey similarly wrote "Love is a self-sacrificing desire for and delight in the welfare of the one love."<sup>3</sup>

These brothers are basically taking the *agape* love that the Apostle John has been commanding throughout his letter and applying it to God—which is quite appropriate. God's love is seen all throughout Scripture in His numerous merciful and good acts toward people.

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**WHO DELIVERED UP JESUS TO DIE? NOT JUDAS FOR MONEY; NOT PILATE FOR FEAR; NOT THE JEWS FOR ENVY;--BUT THE FATHER FOR LOVE!**

**--OCTAVIUS WINSLOW**

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But what does the Apostle mean when he wrote "God is love"?

To start off, John is not saying that God and love are interchangeable teaching that God is love and love is God. The Greek sentence structure does not allow for this; neither does the rest of Scripture. If this were so, then one could simply worship love or God for it would be the same. Love is something of God, but it is not God.

Secondly, John is not teaching the idea that God is love and only love. There are passages that describe God with this structure: God is holy (Leviticus 19:2); God is a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24); God is light (1 John 1:5); God is Spirit (John 4:24). And along these same lines, John is not saying that love is God's primary attribute. Scripture reveals numerous characteristics and attributes which can be found in Him. One would be hard-pressed to prove that any take a primary position over the others.<sup>4</sup>

What John is teaching is that one of God's attributes is love. The emphasis is that God is known for or characterized by love. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote, "He (Apostle John) says, 'God is love;' God essentially is love; God's nature is love; you cannot think of God without love."<sup>5</sup> And R.C. Sproul penned, "Because God is love, He is loving in His nature and all of His actions reflect that love."<sup>6</sup>

In the context of this passage, John is also instructing his readers that the source of true love is God Himself. Self-sacrificing *agape* love is from God. Self-sacrificing *agape* love is seen in God's actions. And anyone who practices this type of *agape* love is of God (1 John 4:7, 12, 16). The one who does not practice this is not of God (1 John 4: 8, 20). In other words, the child of God resembles his or her Father in the manner of self-sacrificing *agape* love.

### GOD IS LOVE: IT'S GREATNESS

The greatness of God's love is seen in the greatness of His being. When we see the love of God in the light of who He is, we can exclaim with David:

*Psalm 63:2-3 I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.*

God's love is **eternal**. There is no beginning with God and no end. He always has been and always will be. Since there is no end to God, there is no end to His love. Twenty-six times in Psalm 136 the refrain is sung "for His steadfast love endures forever" (ESV).

*Jeremiah 31:3 The LORD appeared to him from afar, saying, "I have loved you with an everlasting love..."*

Along the same lines, God's love is **infinite**. His love is without limit. "There is a depth to it which none can fathom; there is a height to it which none can scale; there is a length and breadth to it which defies measurement by any creature standard."<sup>7</sup> So "great" is God's love for the world that He sent His Son (John 3:16). It is a love beyond measure

*Ephesians 2:4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us...*

God's love is **immutable**. There is no changing in the character of God, "with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow" (James 1:17b). God's love for David did not change when David committed adultery and lied. God's love for the nation of Israel did not change in spite of their constant rebellion and chasing after other 'gods' (Micah 7:18). God's love did not change when Peter betrayed Christ and the disciples all fled the scene. There is nothing that can change, stop or even increase God's great love that He has for His people.

# Missouri

## God is Love (1 John 4:8, 16)

*Romans 8:38-39 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

God's love is also **holy**. "Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD of Hosts" sang the Seraphim as Isaiah was given a glimpse of the LORD (Isaiah 6:1-4). And it is the song that John heard as he stepped in to the throne room of the LORD 800 years later. Therefore, God's love is holy. It is not mere sentiment or passion, but a love directed by purity. It is a love that does not sin and will not tolerate sin. It is a love that disciplines the one being loved (Hebrews 12:6).

God's love is very **gracious**. This is the point of the most recognizable verse in Scripture—John 3:16. It was His great love for the world and everything in it that sent His Son into the world to be the sacrifice for sinners. "Who delivered up Jesus to die? Not Judas for money; not Pilate for fear; not the Jews for envy;--but the Father for love!"<sup>8</sup>

*Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

The beauty of God's love is also enhanced when one meditates on the truth that God in His infinite knowledge knows everything one has said, done or has thought about, AND knows everything that one will say, do or think about—yet, He still loves. He still has a passion to see that the needs of His people are met.

## GOD IS LOVE: MANIFESTED

So how is the love of God seen by people?

<sup>1</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, Vol. 3, Psalm 111-150 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers), 204.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2002), 414.

<sup>3</sup> R.A. Torrey, *The God of the Bible* (New Kensington, Penn.: Whitaker House, 1999), 169.

<sup>4</sup> "The attributes are essential to the nature of God. They comprise the characteristics of God that distinguish Him as God. It is precisely in *sum total* of His attributes that His essence as God finds expression. With them He is distinguished as God from all other entities." (Robert Raymond, *A New*

- He makes the sun to shine on the good and the evil and to bring rain on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45)
- He sent His Son so that people can be saved (John 3:16)
- He has made people, who were former rebels to Him, His children (1 John 3:1)
- He has made atonement for the sins of His people for they were totally unable to satisfy His wrath (1 John 4:8-10)
- He has given His people eternal life (Titus 3:3-7)
- He disciplines those whom He loves so they may do what is right and live holy lives (Hebrews 12:5-11)
- He has said that He will never forget them (Isaiah 49:15-16) nor will He leave them or forsake them (Hebrews 13:5).

*Ephesians 2:4-7 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

## CONCLUSION

"The love of God is one of the great realities of the universe, a pillar upon which the hope of the world rests. But it is a personal, intimate thing, too. God does not love populations, He loves people. He loves not masses, but men. He loves us all with a mighty love that has no beginning and can have no end." --A.W. Tozer

God, in His love, through His Son Jesus Christ, can forgive a person of his or her sins--are you interested?

*Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1998), 101)

<sup>5</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Love of God: Studies in 1 John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 43.

<sup>6</sup> R.C. Sproul, *Loved by God* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2001), 11.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *The Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, reprint 1996), 79-80.

<sup>8</sup> Octavius Winslow, quoted by John R.W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1986), 61.