

# 1 JOHN 4:7-21

## 11: THE LOVE OF GOD



### Context & Historical Background

John's letters at the back of the New Testament don't specifically identify John (Son of Zebedee) as the original author, and refer to someone named "The Elder." Yet most Biblical scholars identify the author of these letters as John the Apostle because of their similarities with John's gospel. He likely wrote them while ministering in or around Ephesus.

Near the end of the 1st century there were groups of people stirring up trouble amongst different church communities. John calls them "deceivers," and they had denied Jesus and him coming as the Messiah. One of these false beliefs you might have heard of: Gnosticism. Gnostics were those who claimed to have "secret knowledge," and they claimed that Jesus wasn't really a human being. They thought that Jesus' commands to love one another were secondary to knowing God. John writes this letter to do some damage control—he wants to assure followers of Jesus of their faith and the love of God. He highlights the importance of God's love for following Jesus and for being in the church.



### Related Scriptures

John 13:34 - Love one another as I have loved you.

1 Corinthians 13 - Paul's view of love.

Deuteronomy 6:5 - Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength

Jeremiah 31:6 - God has loved us with an everlasting love

Luke 6:27-36 - Love your enemies



### Key Terms

**Love:** More than just "liking" something or someone, this Greek word (agape) implies strong admiration and affection. It is the highest form of love and is an others-focused, self-giving love.

**Believe:** In verse 16, Paul says to "pisteuo" in God's love. The word is often translated as "believe," but the fuller concept would include faith, trust, or, probably better yet, allegiance. It implies both a knowledge and a way of life.



## Key Themes

**God is Love:** Love is a funny word, and one we tend to overuse. You can love God, but you can also love The Office or ice cream. So what does John mean when he says “God is love?” He doesn’t have in mind mere sentiment or affection. 13th century theologian Thomas Aquinas gives a good definition of the kind of love John has in mind here. He said that love includes two interconnected desires: a desire for the good of the beloved and a desire for union with the beloved. This includes a complete self-giving towards the pursuit of these goals. God love manifests this kind of love in Jesus being sent into the world to die for it. This is not only for the good of the world, but done to bring about a greater union between God and us.

The cultural view of love is often very different. Instead of “God is love,” the culture will invert this by saying “love is God.” This view typically emphasizes the emotion at the expense of choice. When love is reduced to an emotion or how we “feel” about the other, love becomes more about being nice or celebrating the other person regardless of the way they choose to live. But God’s love isn’t a warm, fuzzy feeling—it’s an expression of his good and perfect will. Ravi Zacharias says that “to love another is more about the will than about emotion.” We love another person when we will what’s best for them and desire union with them, not by condoning their every behavior. Parents that love their children will punish and correct them, not for the sake of punishment, but so they learn to live a better life.

**We love because He first loved us:** Jesus’ two greatest commandments are to love God and love others. John reminds us of these important commandments again. It might sound easy at first. It’s easy to love people that look like you or talk like you. But, loving others isn’t always easy, especially people we may not get along with, or who we seemingly deem worthy. John invites us to take a deeper look at what God’s love means for us here. He’s saying because God loved us, and gave His one and only son for us, our response should be to love others in the same way. The love of God not only provides a definition for love, but a way of living love.

Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross is the best example of agape: a true, self-sacrificial love. Jesus’ love for us is given not because we are especially lovable or deserving of his love, and our love for others should model this. God loves us and has fully given himself to us without expecting anything in return, therefore, we are to love without expecting anything in return. Just as in Jesus’ ministry on earth, the status of the person wasn’t what was important. Jesus often loved the unlovable and even his enemies. John tells us that Jesus’ love for us is an example that we walk in. This not only means a self-sacrificial, agape kind of love, but it is an example for who to love as well.

**Assurance:** This passage continually refers to the indwelling of God made present through his Holy Spirit. John reminds us that by the gift of the Holy Spirit, God has given us himself so that we know we are abiding in His truth. As Christians the Spirit is given to us, which keeps us tethered to God. The Spirit’s work in us is evidence that God is with us, and gives us assurance that our faith is secure in Christ. As Christians, it’s easy to doubt whether or not we are “saved.” We worry that our lack of prayer or quiet time means we aren’t saved. We worry that, since we ha-

ven't yet memorized John's gospel, we might not make it into heaven. But thankfully, us making it into heaven isn't dependent on what we do to show our devotion to God. Out of his love God gave his Son and gives his Spirit, and we know his love in this.

## 📖 Quotes & Illustrations

*"God, who needs nothing, loves into existence wholly superfluous creatures in order that He may love and perfect them. He creates the universe, already foreseeing - or should we say "seeing"? there are no tenses in God - the buzzing cloud of flies about the cross, the flayed back pressed against the uneven stake, the nails driven through the mesial nerves, the repeated incipient suffocation as the body droops, the repeated torture of back and arms as it is time after time, for breath's sake, hitched up. If I may dare the biological image, God is a "host" who deliberately creates His own parasites; causes us to be that we may exploit and "take advantage of" Him. Herein is love. This is the diagram of Love Himself, the inventor of all loves."*

C. S. LEWIS, THE FOUR LOVES

*"It is easy to acknowledge, but almost impossible to realize for long, that we are mirrors whose brightness, if we are bright, is wholly derived from the sun that shines upon us."*

C. S. LEWIS, THE FOUR LOVES

## ! Three Main Points

1. God is love, which shows us what love means. John doesn't mean God is only love, but that God continually gives himself to others and seeks their benefit.
2. God has loved us when we didn't deserve it and without expecting anything in return, which, John reminds us, gives us a reason to love others in a similar way.
3. Because of God's love and his gift of the Spirit, we can be assured of our faith in Christ.

## ? Discussion Questions

- How does our culture often define love?
- What are some of the best examples of love you can think of? (Besides the Father, the Son, or the Spirit)
- How is 1 John 4 definition of love different or alike the way you would describe love?
- Where have you been loved well?
- Where have you not been loved well?
- Has there been a time in your life you remember being deeply loved?
- Do you remember the first time you felt loved by God? Or has this happened?
- What's blocking you from experiencing the love of God?
- Are there relationships in your life that exhibit the love of God?

- Are there unhealthy relationships in your life that are fear-driven rather than love-driven?
- Where have you mistaken fear for love?
- Who in your life have you loved well? Not loved well?
- Loving people isn't always easy- how do we do this well?
- How do you love someone who has deeply wounded you?
- How do you remain in His love?
- Why is it important to stay close to God? (so you can love others?)
- Have you felt undeserving from God's love?
- How does community help us embrace this kind of love? Do you think you can love God alone?
- What holds us back from real love?

## Application & Practice

**Christian Community & Discipleship:** To love God well we must love others well, and to love others well we have to be around them. When we walk in the light of God's love with others, we collectively experience God's love, unity and fellowship, and grow together in Christlikeness. Community is the natural response of those who genuinely live in God's presence. Surround yourself with others who want to grow in Christ, and do life with them. This is God's heart for His people to be in communion with Him and community with each other. If you aren't in a group already, try signing up for one today!

**"Love your enemy."** God calls us to love our enemies. So you might not have enemies, but you probably have people that annoy you or have hurt you in some way. This doesn't mean you have to go be besties with them, but, spend some time intentionally praying for someone this week. Invite God in, ask him to soften your heart and to have His eyes and His love for this person. This could also open doors for conversations that might need to take place too-for forgiveness, for clarity, (etc. )Also, don't do this alone. Talk with your group leader about it and have them pray with you.

**Serve in Your Community.** Jesus says that loving others means to seek the well-being of others without expecting anything in return. This week, try doing your roommates dishes, make a meal for someone, or maybe cover a shift for someone you work with. Or even grab a groups of friends and serve downtown at Lighthouse Ministries. Be creative and find fun ways to love those around you on campus!

## Going Deeper

**Commentary:** *The Four Loves* – C. S. Lewis

**Video.** *Agape Love* – Bible Project