

# In This Is Love

*1 John 4:7-11*

*With Study Questions*

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## **Review One Through Six: Testing Spirits**

In the first six verses of 1 John 4, John exhorts his readers to distinguish between the spirit of God and the spirit of antichrist (one, of course, to be embraced, the other rejected.) We have come to realize that this is done by examining the teaching or doctrine of the false prophets against the teaching or doctrine of the apostles (“us” in verse six referring to John as a representative apostle) since they are the foundation of the Christian faith (Ephesians 2:20). We move now to verses seven and eight.

### **I. Two Questions:**

**“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> He who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:7,8).**

What John seems to be saying in verses seven and eight is, if one is truly saved, they ought to love others the way God loves them. If they don’t, they don’t know God. Now these two verses open up some interesting and difficult questions.

### **Do Non-Christians Love?**

For example, does this mean non-Christians don’t love at all? It would seem almost silly to suggest that non-Christians don’t love at all in any respect. For we all know people who are outside the faith who are warm, caring, selfless and faithful individuals. They might feed the hungry, practice all sorts of self-denial in an effort to help others and be faithful in marriage for half a century. And I would say that if you know people who fall into this category, you should encourage such good behavior.

But somehow we can’t escape the fact that John is teaching that everyone who loves is born of God. Are we, therefore, to conclude that these people must be born of God even though they have no profession of faith and reject the notion of Jesus Christ as Savior? Surely this would be inconsistent with the clear teaching of scripture (Romans 10:9,10). John must have something else in mind. What do you suppose?

## **How Much Love is Necessary?**

Another question which arises is, Does this mean that if you don't love you're not born again? And if that is the case, how much do we need to love in order to be confident that we are born again? Certainly none of us are so confident in our ability to love others that we would permit it to be the criterion by which we are allowed to enter heaven? So how do we approach these very well-known verses? Allow me to give you two possibilities; both of which may apply.

The answers to these questions may radically affect our view of love and our view of how our faith works itself out in our lives.

## **II. Two Answers**

### **Answer One--Only Christians Have Christian Love**

First of all, even though pagans may have a love of sorts, they do not—in fact can not—love in the sense which John so indicates. Clearly love can mean all sorts of things in varying cultures. The homosexual claims love for his community, as does the adulterer and those who practice promiscuity. The Christian can grant that there is some sort of affection there, even an affection accompanied by commitment, but it is hardly a Christian view of love.

There are other examples that are not so obviously non-Christian. For example, it is quite easy for those who name the name of Christ to be swept away in books and movies, where love is tantamount to romance, emotionalism and different forms of relational excitement. I must add here that I am not against romance and emotions. I thoroughly enjoy both. But these abstract things must not be the barometer by which we measure true biblical love.

### **True Love Has an Eye Toward God**

If we are going to make sense of John's words we must recognize that there is an aspect of love, biblical love, godly love, I might go so far as to say true love, that the unbeliever is incapable of. And what is this love? It is a love that has its eye on the commandments of God. John will point out in the next chapter,

**“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments” (1 John 5:3).**

This is the love which separates the believer from the unbeliever. Love is a settled decision to obey God's laws.<sup>1</sup> But someone might say, "I know many unbelievers who obey God's laws. They are faithful to their spouses, they are honest, they respect the property of others, etc." To this I say two things: First, they may respect the second half of the commandments, but they certainly have no respect for the first half which address men's relationship with God. Secondly, there is a world of difference in obeying God's laws because they seem to be the most advantageous way of living and obeying God's laws because they are God's laws. When I tell my child to do, or not to do, something, I don't consider her behavior very honorable when she is trying to figure out if it is in her best interests. In fact, I view that as rebellion and the sort of rebellion which may cause great damage in her life if she vacillates in her decision to obey me in a dangerous situation, e.g., running in the street.

### **A Child's Obedience**

One of the most precious moments I remember with my three-year-old was her mistakenly thinking that her mother asked her to go out to the car to get her pajamas at about nine o'clock in the evening. It was dark outside and she was afraid and started crying. Nevertheless she headed for the front door and sought to make her way out to the car with much fear and trembling. We suddenly realized that she thought her pajamas were in the car, though they were actually in her room, and immediately comforted her. I was moved however, that she was willing to do something so fearful and quite frankly something which seemed unwise simply because her mother asked her. This is an example of Christian obedience.

### **Why We Obey**

It should be noted that all of God's laws are advantageous to those who keep them. God is not some sort of capricious or whimsical dictator who just thinks it would be nice to get his subjects to do His bidding. There are always blessings attached to obedience and curses attached to disobedience. But seeking to gain the blessings and avoid the curses, though important, should not be the primary motivation for the Christian. The Christian obeys God's laws because they have recognized, by the grace of God, how much they have been loved by God. Here I will jump to verse eleven.

**"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11).**

We do not obey God's laws because we think it will best serve our purposes.

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon Clark, *First John* (The Trinity Foundation, 1980), p. 131.

## **What's In It For Me?**

I fear this low grade method of Christian living has invaded the church. We have all sorts of programs on how to get the most out of our marriages, our parenting, various relationships, etc. We are surrounded and bombarded with pragmatic church growth methods, and program and people oriented modes of fulfilling the Great Commission. There is very much a, "I want to be godly, but what's in it for me?" disposition wafting through the church.

With this disposition, how easy it would be to persuade one to eat forbidden fruit, which didn't seem to have any clear immoral stigma attached to it other than sheer disobedience to the God who commanded it not be eaten. How easy it has been to convince an entire generation of people that the Sabbath needn't be obeyed and that the second commandment doesn't apply to pictures of Jesus. After all, it seems almost impossible to connect the dots from the violation of these commandments to any clear negative effect upon my personal life. "Images help my faith." is the claim of many. They know better than God.

## **Love How We're Loved**

I mention all of this because the only way a person can truly and biblically love another person is with an eye toward God. True Christian love means we love others the way God loves us (addressed in a moment) which is something a non-Christian is incapable of doing since they cannot ponder nor imitate something they don't have.

So the world may love, and in certain respects they may have great love, but they can't have godly love, for godly love means I love you the way God loves me.

## **Answer Two—Already Answered**

After a long answer to the first question I give a short answer to the second question. Since only a Christian can love with an eye toward God, if that type of love is present at all, it is a sign that of true faith. For why would a pagan love with an eye toward a God in whom they do not believe?

So we see here that it is not so much the quantity of the love in question but the quality of the love in question. Certainly there were few more devout than the Pharisees. They had mass quantities of good works. But there works were not on account of having been forgiven much. Loving others because we have been forgiven much is the Christian quality of love.

### **III. Docetists Don't Care**

#### **John's Two Issues**

Having said all this, allow me to address another reason why John might be harping on the issue of loving one another—especially with an eye toward God. John seems to be dealing with two issues throughout his epistles which very much relate to each other. One issue is false teaching which suggests that it doesn't matter if we love our brother. But attached to that teaching is the heresy of Docetism. We learned last week that the Docetist doesn't view Jesus as a real person who came in the flesh, but more of an imaginary person who didn't actually suffer on a cross.

#### **Imaginary Faith Doesn't Affect Behavior**

I don't wish to spend too much time on this, but suffice it to say those who do not view Jesus as a real physical person in history will generally not view their faith in such a way as to allow it to have demands on their actual behavior in the real world. In other words their entire faith is functioning at an ethereal level which never manifests itself in the material world. If Jesus is an imaginary person who never touched the material world, I have no need to allow my faith in Him to impinge upon my material world. I must say that every person I have ever met who has had anything like this view of Jesus, has not allowed their faith to determine their behavior whatsoever.

#### **Summary**

In summary, any understanding of the Christian faith which suggests there is no need to love our brothers is not the Christian faith. And any love we exhibit toward one another that is not on account of the love God has toward us is not Christian love, nor should it be considered true biblical love. John continues.

### **IV. How Are We Loved?**

**In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him” (1 John 4:9).**

#### **Manifested Love**

John now elaborates on Christian love. How is the love of God manifested (or made known) toward us? It is manifested in the fact that God sent His Son into the world (the real world) that we might live. It is worth noting here that not only must we assert that non-Christians don't biblically love, they don't biblically live.

### **Sacrificial And Unconditional Love**

Obviously we see here a sacrificial love. The love you and I are to imitate is a sacrificial love, i.e., it costs us something. And it is a love that has no assignable cause save the nature of the one who chooses to love. In other words God simply chose to love you, then expressed that love with a genuine act of sacrifice. You and I did nothing to deserve it. And apart from God's prevenient grace, we would never have even asked for it. People often wonder if we should love and forgive people who are evil and don't ask for forgiveness. Apart from God's first act of love, we certainly would have remained in our dismal unforgiven state. How clearly this is brought out in the next verse.

**“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).**

Here we see the promise recorded by Moses.

**“And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live” (Deut. 30:6).**

### **Why Harp On Calvinism?**

We love God because He loves us first. And it is not as if His love might fail. His love for us would irresistibly bring us to Him. It is a circumcision of our hearts. In the same way an infant would be circumcised without having any say in the matter, so the objects of God's love would find in themselves a love for God which is evidence of a circumcised heart.

People wonder why I harp on a Calvinistic understanding of salvation. Among other things it will surely effect our love for others. One need not be a logician to see that if we view our salvation as a cooperative effort between us and God, then our ability to love others as we have been loved will be radically compromised. My love for others will then be based upon the same merit I supposed I had which brought God's love to me. Truly a misunderstanding of the doctrines of grace will have its way in every aspect of our lives.

### **Propitiation**

I would be remiss to neglect a definition of propitiation at this juncture. Among the Greeks the idea of propitiation was to appease the wrath of the gods. Of course Greek gods were very fickle and temperamental so the idea doesn't transfer well when applied to a good, not to mention real, God. But it must be understood thus: That the wrath of God rests upon humanity because God is just and man is sinful. This is due to the fact that God, being a just judge, must punish sin. We all know this principle and despise any court in which it is not done. But God was not willing to punish men with His wrath and condemn them all to utter and eternal darkness.

We are told He was not willing to do this because of His great love toward us. So He sent His Son. I might add, not an unwilling Son, but a Son who was of the same mind as His Father. We must not look at the Father as hating us, nor at the Son as reluctantly saving us. Our loving and just Father sent His Willing Son to save people who were in rebellion and deserving of God's wrath.

The Son became a man and took rank with humanity as a brother in the flesh. As a member of the human race—a race which He created—He took all the punishment which we deserved upon Himself, thus appeasing the just wrath of the Father.

And one last very important point: When one, by the grace of God, comes to realize that this has been done for him, he will begin to love God and love his neighbor. This is the necessary fruit of those who are of genuine faith.

## Questions for Study

1. When John says that everyone who loves is born of God, does this mean that unbelievers, if they love, are somehow saved? If not, how do you explain the statement?
2. How much love must we have before we can be confident we're saved?
3. What is a clear distinction between a biblical view of love and a worldly view of love?
4. Is why we obey God important? Why?
5. Discuss the "What's in it for me?" mentality of obeying God?
6. Discuss the quantity versus quality of love issue on the bottom of page 5.
7. How come Docetists don't care?
8. How is God's love manifested?
9. Why is it important to know God loved us first?
10. Why does your pastor harp on Calvinism?
11. Discuss propitiation.